NATION

Lockdown rumours false, no such proposal: Govt

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BUSINESS

Markets dive over 2% amid geopolitical tensions

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SPORTS

RCB look to regroup as CSK, MI hunt lost glory

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Tiger found dead in a snare in Nagarahole

MYSURU, 27 MARCH

A three-year-old male tiger was found dead after being caught in a snare near the Metikuppe range of Nagarahole Tiger Reserve in Hunsur taluk. The snare, reportedly set to trap wild boar, was laid on a private farm in Asanagundi, about 300 metres from the reserve boundary. According to Deputy Conservator of Forests and Project Director Seema, the land belongs to a farmer named Girish and the snare is believed to have been set by labourers. The post-mortem was conducted as per National Tiger Conservation Authority guidelines before cremation. Forest officials have launched a probe, while Karnataka Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre has ordered an inquiry.

—SALAR NEWS

7 killed, 5 injured as avalanche hits Zojila Pass

SRINAGAR, 27 MARCH

At least seven people were killed, and five were injured on Friday after a massive avalanche struck the Srinagar-Leh highway. The snow slide hit the Ladakh side of the Zojila Pass, trapping many passenger vehicles. After the incident, the highway is completely blocked. Authorities are trying to remove the snow. The Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, who is monitoring the situation, said, "Heard the news of an avalanche at Zoji La. I directed the DC & SSP of Kargil to supervise rescue operations. All government agencies have been put on high alert."

— AGENCIES

NIA gets 45 more days to probe Red Fort blast

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

A Delhi court on Friday permitted National Investigation Agency (NIA) an extension of 45 days to complete its probe into the Red Fort blast on 10 November last year. Special Judge Prashant Sharma also extended the judicial custody of several accused. The agency has arrested 11 suspects so far. The plea cited the need for more time due to recent arrests in February, including Zameer Ahmad Ahangar and Tufail Ahmad Bhat from Jammu and Kashmir. *—PTI*

DGCA issues new rules for plane firms flying VVIPs

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Aviation regulator DGCA on Friday issued guidelines for aircraft operators flying VVIPs, including chief ministers, central ministers and governors. The guidelines, applicable for non-scheduled aircraft and helicopter operators carrying VVIPs, also come against the backdrop of the fatal plane crash in January that killed Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. DGCA said analysis of earlier accidents/incidents associated with aircraft operations to/from airstrips/temporary helipads, and during election flying of VVIPs, has often revealed violation of instructions and safety was jeopardised. *—PTI*

Govt cuts excise duty on petrol, diesel by Rs 10/L

This is after crude surged 50% this month amid Iran war

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

The government has slashed excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 10 per litre each to shield consumers from a sharp surge in global oil prices triggered by the West Asia conflict, at an estimated annual revenue cost of Rs 1.75 lakh crore.

The special additional excise duty on petrol has been cut from Rs 13 per litre to Rs 3, while that on diesel has been reduced from Rs 10 to nil, according to a late-night notification.

At the same time, duties on exports of diesel and aviation turbine fuel (ATF) have been reintroduced, with levies of Rs 21.5 per litre and Rs 29.5 per litre respectively. The move revives a mechanism first introduced in July 2022 to curb windfall gains by refiners, though no such tax has been imposed this time on domestic crude producers such as ONGC.

Following the revision, the total excise duty on petrol stands at Rs 11.9 per litre and Rs 7.80 per litre on diesel.

—FREEPIK

The decision comes as crude oil prices surged nearly 50 per cent this month, briefly touching USD 119 per barrel before easing to around USD 100. Despite this, retail fuel prices have remained largely frozen, leading to mounting losses for oil marketing companies.

The duty cut is expected to offset part of the price increase required, estimated at Rs 24 per litre for petrol and Rs 30 for diesel, due to higher crude costs.

According to ICRA, fuel retailers could incur losses of Rs 11 per litre on petrol and Rs 14 on diesel if crude averages USD 100–105 per barrel.

The fiscal impact will be significant. CBIC chairman Vivek Chaturvedi said the excise cut would cost about Rs 7,000 crore over a fortnight, partly offset by Rs 1,500 crore from higher export duties, resulting in a net loss of Rs 5,500 crore.

Excise cut won't lower fuel prices for consumers

The government's cut in excise duty on petrol and diesel will not translate into lower pump prices for consumers. Instead, the move is aimed at offsetting the impact of rising global crude oil prices. As a result, retail rates are expected to remain unchanged, with state-run oil companies maintaining current prices to shield consumers from a potential hike rather than offering any immediate relief.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the move would protect consumers, while Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri highlighted the sharp rise in global crude prices. *—PTI*

Modi meets CMs amid Iran war crisis

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Prime Minister Modi reviewed with chief ministers of all states except the poll-bound ones their preparedness in the context of the West Asia conflict.

The virtual meeting on Friday was aimed at ensuring synergy in the spirit of 'Team India', official sources said.

This is the first time the prime minister held such a meeting with the chief ministers on the West Asia conflict which started on 28 February.

The chief ministers who attended the meeting are N Chandrababu Naidu (Andhra Pradesh), Yogi Adityanath (Uttar Pradesh), Revanth Reddy (Telangana), Bhagwant Mann (Punjab), Bhupendra Patel (Gujarat), Omar Abdullah (Jammu and Kashmir), Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu (Himachal Pradesh), Pema Khandu (Arunachal Pradesh) among others.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Home Minister Amit Shah were also present.

"The PM interacted with the chief ministers through video conferencing. The meeting focused on ensuring synergy in the Team India spirit," a source said.

CM Siddaramaiah and Narendra

The chief ministers of election-bound states were not part of this meeting due to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC).

The Cabinet Secretariat is going to hold a separate meeting with the chief secretaries of poll-bound Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam, Kerala and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

The government has set up an 'informal group of ministers' headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to look into issues arising out of the West Asia conflict, sources said on Friday.

Union ministers Amit Shah, Nirmala Sitharaman and Hardeep Singh Puri are among the members of the informal group of ministers (IGOM), they said. *— PTI*

B'luru Central, East City Corp present maiden Budgets

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

The Bengaluru Central City Corporation (BCCC) and Bengaluru East City Corporation (BECC) on Friday presented their maiden budget for 2026–27 with a total outlay of Rs 3,427 crore and Rs 3,889.98 crore respectively.

These are the first budget to be presented since the creation of the five separate City Corporations under the Greater Bengaluru Authority in September 2025, replacing the single Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP).

The North, West and South division are expected to present their Budget on Saturday.

'POTHOLE FREE' BCCC

The BCCC Budget was presented by Central City Corporation Commissioner Rajendra Cholan P for the financial year 2026–27, and pledged to make every ward in the corporation "pothole free".

The BCCC includes few of the busiest areas in the city including the Central Business District (CBD).

"To elevate the commercial significance of the City to a global level, we will develop selected roads as Business Corridors," the statement said. "We will provide state-of-the-art infrastructure in these corridors and collect higher premium fees," which it said will be reinvested into infrastructure.

GBA Chief Maheshwar Rao with Bengaluru Central Commissioner Rajendra Cholan at Town Hall in Bengaluru on Friday *—MOAHMMED ASAD*

The "citizen-centric" Budget also a slew of beatification projects and healthcare initiatives, including bike ambulances.

Further, Rs 141.75 crore has been allocated for the holistic development of each ward, at Rs 2.25 crore per ward, the budget statement said.

ORR FOCUS FOR BECC

The BECC Budget focused on infrastructure, connectivity and healthcare.

The Budget provides for asphalting and development of Outer Ring Road (ORR) service roads from KR Puram to Ibblur Junction. An allocation of Rs 112.5 crore has been made for the overall development and maintenance of all roads and drains within the corporation's jurisdiction (50 wards), amounting to Rs 2.25 crore per ward. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

GOYAL HOLDS TALKS WITH US AND CHINA OVER TRADE TIES

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal engaged in separate discussions with US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao during the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14) in Yaounde, Cameroon. Goyal highlighted the importance of deepening economic ties and advancing negotiations.

In his meeting with Greer, Goyal said, "Had a very productive discussion with @USTradeRep Jamieson Greer on the sidelines of the WTO Ministerial Conference. Exchanged views on the #WTOMC14 agenda, next steps in the India-US BTA negotiations and explored ways to further deepen our economic cooperation and bilateral trade ties."

The two sides discussed the framework for the first phase of the India-US bilateral trade agreement, which has yet to be signed. The US had agreed to reduce tariffs to 18 per cent, but recent changes, including a 10 per cent tariff.

Goyal also met with Wang Wentao, exchanging views on trade matters amid India's trade deficit with China surpassing USD 102 billion. India's exports to China rose 37.66 per cent to USD 17.54 billion, while imports increased 15.21 per cent to USD 119.55 billion during April-February 2025-26. —PTI

Congress rebel candidate Sadiq Pailwan met CM Siddaramaiah in Bengaluru on Friday *—SALAR*

Cong rebel candidate withdraws from Davangere South bypoll

BENGALURU/ DAVANGERE, 27 MARCH

Congress rebel candidate Sadiq Pailwan on Friday withdrew from the Davanagere South Assembly bypoll, backing the party's official nominee Samarth Mallikarjun in a move aimed at preventing a split in votes.

Pailwan announced his decision at the KPCC office in the presence of AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala, KPCC President and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. MLA Rizwan Arshad and Chief Whip Salim Ahmed were also present.

"I was a candidate for the Muslim community, but responding to the request of the Chief Minister and KPCC president, I have decided to withdraw," Pailwan said, urging voters to support Samarth by a huge margin. He described late leader Shamanur Shivashankarappa as his political mentor.

The 9 April bypoll, necessitated by Shivashankarappa's death, will see Samarth Mallikarjun, his grandson, contest against BJP's Srinivas T Dasakariyappa.

The withdrawal comes a day after attempts by Congress leaders to persuade Pailwan failed, with his supporters raising "go back" slogans during a meeting outside his residence. Leaders had cited lack of time as the reason for his inability to withdraw earlier.

Meanwhile, Shivakumar dismissed reports of internal dissent, asserting there would be no division of minority or other votes. "All are our people... differences during elections are natural, but we will set things right," he said. *—Salar News*

GOVT TO BUY JETS, ARTILLERY WORTH RS 2.38 LAKH CR

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

In a major push to bolster military capabilities, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, has accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for procurement projects worth Rs 2.38 lakh crore.

Key approvals include Medium Transport Aircraft (MTA) for the Indian Air Force to replace the ageing An-32 fleet and bridge the gap with IL-76 aircraft. The new planes, with a payload of 18–30 tonnes, are likely to be sourced from contenders such as the Embraer C-390, Airbus A400M and Lockheed Martin's C-130J. Of these, 12 will be acquired in fly-away condition, with the rest manufactured in India.

The DAC also cleared five additional squadrons of the S-400 air defence missile system, which can strike targets up to 400 km away. India currently operates three squadrons, with two more expected this year.

Further approvals include 300 additional Dhanush artillery guns, armoured-piercing tank ammunition, drones, overhaul of AL-31 engines for Su-30MKI jets, and heavy-duty hovercraft for the Coast Guard. Procurements will follow the Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020.

Separately, the defence ministry signed contracts worth Rs 858 crore, including a Rs 445 crore deal with Russia's Rosoboronexport for Tunguska air defence missile systems for the Army, and a Rs 413 crore agreement with Boeing India for maintenance of the Navy's P-8I maritime reconnaissance aircraft fleet. *—PTI*

BALEN SHAH TAKES OATH

Your appointment reflects the trust reposed in your leadership by the people of Nepal. I look forward to working closely with you to take India-Nepal friendship and cooperation to even greater heights for the mutual benefit of our two peoples

—Narendra Modi, PM

Nepal's youngest Prime Minister Balendra Shah took oath in Kathmandu on Friday and moved swiftly to restructure the cabinet, merging ministries to streamline governance and improve coordination. Popularly known as 'Balen', he retained the Defence and Industry, and Commerce portfolios. China welcomed his appointment as it looks to reshape Nepal policy beyond the era of KP Sharma Oli, who had drawn Kathmandu closer to Beijing *—PTI* *>>>MORE ON PAGES 5 & 6*

INTRODUCES GRADING SYSTEM

Karnataka govt to scrap marks for third language in SSLC exams

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

Karnataka Minister Madhu Bangarappa said on Friday that, starting this academic year, the government will replace the marks system for the third language in the SSLC (Class 10) exam with a grading system that will not impact a student's overall results.

He said that until now, the Secondary School Leaving Certificate exams had a total of 625 marks, including 100 marks for the third language. With this decision, the total will be reduced to 525 marks.

Speaking to reporters, the Minister for School Education and Literacy said the 100 marks previously allotted for the third language will be graded and will not impact a student's overall results.

He said that, "While Hindi is the most commonly taught third language in Karnataka, Kannada organisations and activists have expressed concern that it is being imposed. They also pointed out that Kannadiga children find it difficult to read and write Hindi. This decision aims to ease that burden."

Stating that the third language exams will now be graded A, B, C, or D, Bangarappa said an official order in this regard will be issued soon, adding that there is no pass or fail in the exams. *—PTI*

Infra, health focus of B'luru East & Centre Corp

From bike ambulances, AI collecting taxes to road fixes, 2 corps' Budget aims to develop Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

Infrastructure, connectivity and healthcare were the focus of the first Budgets presented by the Bengaluru East City Corporation (BECC) and Bengaluru Central City Corporation (BCCC) on Friday.

GBA Chief Commissioner Maheshwar Rao with Bengaluru Central City Commissioner Rajendra Cholan, Additional Commissioner Daljit Kumar, at Town Hall in Bengaluru, on Friday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

BECC TO GET MONEY FROM AI-TAXES

BECC said there was a proposal to "expand the tax base using 3D modelling and AI-based systems, along with the development of a GIS-based property information system for citizens."

The corporation said AI will be used to identify tax defaulters, and through data integration, the tax network will be expanded, with a target of generating an additional Rs 100 crore annually.

However, the corporation said a revenue target of Rs 1,500 crore has been set for 2026–27, to be achieved without imposing additional taxes. "A GIS-based property tax system is being integrated with agencies such as BESCOM and BWSSB Through property tax reforms, an additional annual revenue of Rs 150 crore is expected".

MOBILE VETS, PHCS

Under the 'Brand Bengaluru–Health' initiative, Rs 35 crore has been allocated for the establishment of 15 primary health centres (PHCs) and 10 Namma Clinics in the East corporation, the budget said.

In addition, Rs 50 lakh was allocated to introduce mobile veterinary vehicles for on-site treatment, and Rs 2 crore has been earmarked for setting up a dedicated unit for disposing of animal carcasses.

BIKE AMBULANCES FOR BCCC

Calling the budget "truly citizen-centric", the BCCC said it will deploy bike ambulances under the First Responder Unit scheme to navigate traffic and provide free, life-saving care during the critical "golden hour".

It also announced the establishment of 22 high-tech 'smart virtual clinics' at a cost of Rs 19 crore to deliver corporate-style medical services for the poor.

The Budget proposed the launch of 'Vatsalya Mane', a day-care centre for specially-abled children, and 'Hiriyara Vadi', a residential scheme for elderly people without caregivers.

The Corporation said it collected Rs 900 crore in taxes in 2025–26 and has set a revenue target of Rs 1,150 crore for 2067-27

BEAUTIFICATION IN CENTRAL CORP

The Budget provides for the revitalisation of the century-old Russell Market at a cost of Rs 70 crore, and Rs 20 crore has been earmarked for the development of other markets.

It also projects a 60 per cent reduction in electricity bills through the use of LED lights and proposes the creation of Blue-Green Corridors to transform Central Bengaluru into a safer, more sustainable and vibrant city, it said. A pilot scheme will be undertaken to train and certify street food vendors for food safety. —*PTI*

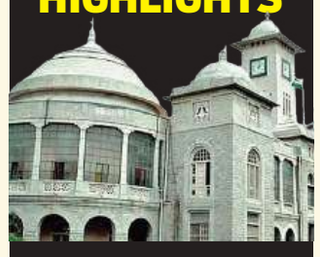
EAST

Rs 112.5 cr
for development all 50 wards.

Rs 227 cr
for infrastructure development in SC/ST, backward class and minority-dominated areas.

- 100km of footpaths to be developed.
- Rs 50 cr for junction improvements, skywalks, and pedestrian-friendly projects on major roads.
- Rs 25 cr for the construction of road under bridges (RUBs) and road over bridges (ROBs).
- Rs 300 cr has been allocated for waste disposal, collection and sanitation works.
- Rs 12 cr for stray dog shelters.
- Rs 53 cr for maintenance of lakes.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS



Here's a breakdown of the allocation for the Bengaluru East and Central City Corporations:

Total expenditure is estimated at **Rs 3,889.98 cr,** a surplus of Rs 1.56 lakh.

Total expenditure at **Rs 3,425 cr,** surplus of Rs 1.38 crore.

CENTRAL

Rs 1,760 cr
for public works

Rs 217.50 cr
for asphalting 145 km of arterial and sub-arterial roads.

- Rs 200 cr for making 115 km of ward roads "pothole free".
- Rs 141.75 cr for each ward, at Rs 2.25 crore per ward.
- Rs 15 cr has been allocated for development of 215 parks
- Rs 215 cr has been allocated for solid waste management.
- 60 new public toilets and 20 SHE Toilets for women will be built.
- Rs 2 cr for shelters for dogs.
- Free treatment for pets, birth control surgeries and vaccination drives.
- Rs 19.38 cr for tree care and canopy management.

KSCA to give 2 tickets per MLA: DKS after meet

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said on Friday that the KSCA has agreed to provide two tickets per MLA for the IPL match on 28 March, at the City's Chinnaswamy Stadium after he and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah met with Karnataka State Cricket Association officials.

On Thursday, Assembly Speaker UT Khader had asked the government to ensure that every MLA receives four VIP tickets at the stadium during matches after MLAs alleged they were "disrespected" by the KSCA.

- This comes after Assembly Speaker UT Khader had asked the government to ensure that every MLA receives four VIP tickets as MLAs said their families also wanted to watch the games.

KSCA officials led by President Venkatesh Prasad, a former cricketer, met both Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar.

"The Speaker had directed to ensure four tickets be given per MLA, but as tickets have already been sold, four tickets cannot be given now," Shivakumar noted.

"We will discuss the remaining things later, but for the first (IPL) match tomorrow they will get two tickets," he added, saying he would discuss the matter again the future.

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya criticised the MLAs for "pleading for tickets".

Reigning champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) will be taking on Sunrisers Hyderabad in the opening fixture of IPL 2026 here on 28 March. —*PTI*

'Excise cut is for oil firms, not people'

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala on Friday accused the BJP-led government at the Centre of attempting to "befool" the people by announcing a reduction in excise duty on petrol and diesel, alleging that the move would benefit oil companies and provide no relief to the common man.

Calling it "headline management" by the Central government, he also warned of an hike in petrol and diesel of up to Rs 20 and gas prices of up to Rs 500 after the upcoming Assembly polls in several states.

The government has slashed excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 10 per litre each amid the Iran war.

"Rs 43 lakh crore... Do not be shocked. That is the money collected by the Modi government and the BJP by taxing the people of India over the last 11 years," Surjewala said while speaking at a presser with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar. "Rs 1,000 crore per day for 11 years—that is how much the Modi government has been collecting by imposing excise and customs duties on petrol and diesel alone."

CM Siddaramaiah, DyCM DK Shivakumar, AICC General Secretary Ranadeep Singh Surjewala during the presser about the LPG and fuel crunch, at the KPCC office in Bengaluru, on Friday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

> **The Government of India is murdering us...they are doing it for the election.**
>
> -DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister

Accusing the Modi government and the BJP of adopting a "dupe, deceive, distract" approach, he said they have attempted to "mislead" the public by announcing a reduction in excise duty and projecting it as a price cut.

"They reduced excise duty on petrol from Rs 13 to Rs 10 per litre, and on diesel from Rs 10 per litre to zero, without providing even a paisa of relief to the common people. This is called balance sheet management," he said.

He further alleged that the burden would ultimately be passed back to the public, with the government recovering the amount through other means.

"It's like inflicting a thousand wounds and then merely putting a band-aid on them," he said.

Pointing out that when the Congress demitted office on 26 May, 2014, petrol was priced at Rs 71 per litre and diesel at Rs 56 per litre, he said prices have now risen to Rs 102 and Rs 91 per litre, respectively. —*PTI*

Cab driver burnt to death after being hit by lorry

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

A 23-year-old driver was burnt to death after a lorry, allegedly overloaded with steel rods, lost control and crashed into a parked car in the early hours of Friday. The deceased, Ambadas from Kalaburagi, was taking a nap inside his vehicle while waiting for a trip via an aggregator app near Kurubarahalli, at around 1.15am. A senior police officer said the lorry was travelling from Andhra Pradesh towards Sunkadakatte, following a route suggested by an app along a steep, narrow road. Due to the heavy load, the driver lost control, dragging the car nearly 100m before hitting a scrap godown. The lorry driver, injured, is hospitalised. A case has been registered against him for causing death by negligence. —*PTI*

UP cancels Rs 25,000 cr MoU with City startup

LUCKNOW, 27 MARCH

The Uttar Pradesh government has cancelled a proposed Rs 25,000 crore MoU with Bengaluru-based start-up Puch AI, citing lack of financial credibility. In a statement, it said a review found the firm lacked requisite net worth and credible financial linkages for the project's scale. "As per standard protocols laid by the state government, the MoU signed with Puch AI on 23 March 2026, was reviewed. Necessary details were sought from the investor, but they were not provided in a timely manner. Due-diligence showed lack of net worth and credible financial linkages for the project's scale," the statement said. The agreement stands cancelled, it added, stressing transparency and probity. —*PTI*

POWER TUSSLE CONTINUES

Make DKS CM or face the music, warn seers

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

In a shot in the arm to Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's reported claim to the post of state Chief Minister, Swamis from 32 backward communities have met him and extended their full support to him in this regard.

Speaking to media, Swami Prana vananda has said that Swamijis from 32 backward communities met DK Shivakumar at his residence four days ago, expressing their full support for him and urging the Congress High Command, led by Mallikarjun Kharge, to immediately make him the Chief Minister of Karnataka.

Swami Pranavandanda cited Shivakumar's dedication to the party and personal sacrifices. He alleged that the current government targeted those who backed him by denying land allocations in the recent budget. They also demanded Sagara MLA Belur Gopalkrishna be made a minister to benefit their community and warned that a protest in Delhi may be planned if their demands are not met.

"…CM targeted Swamijis who supported DK Shivakumar," Swami Pranavananda alleged adding, "If DK Shivakumar is not made Karnataka CM, Congress might face several political problems in Karnataka...Today or tomorrow, 15 Swamijis are going to meet AICC general secretary KC Venugopal in Kerala...If needed, we will plan a protest in Delhi," Swami further warned. —*ANI*

M'luru rowdy sheeter hacked to death on bridge

MANGALURU, 27 MARCH

A 46-year-old rowdy-sheeter, known as 'Tablet Arif', was allegedly hacked to death by a gang near the Thokkottu flyover in Ullal on Friday morning, police said. The incident occurred around 4am when Arif, a resident of Talapady and listed under the Mangaluru South police station limits, was travelling on a motorcycle. A car rammed his bike from behind, causing him to fall onto the road. The attackers then assaulted him with lethal weapons, resulting in his immediate death. They fled the scene in the car.

Police suspected gang rivalry as the motive behind the alleged planned killing, as Arif had multiple criminal cases against him, including murder and attempt to murder. —*Salar News*

Ricky Rai found with fake car plate

This comes after Ricky Rai was booked for a Lamborghini stunt -x

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

Another case has been registered against Ricky Rai, the son of the late underworld operative Muthappa Rai, after a viral video showed a luxury sports car performing dangerous stunts with a fake registration plate, officials said on Friday.

The development comes after a viral video showed the sports car performing high-speed drifting and circular manoeuvres at the Anil Kumble Circle in the early hours of 21 March. Some occupants were seen standing through the sunroof, police said. Police had registered a case on their own against the vehicle owner. The car was later traced to Rai's residence and seized.

Officials found that the Delhi-registered vehicle was having a fancy Karnataka registration number.

RTO enquiries revealed that although Rai had applied for the fancy number in January, the registration was never completed.

Rai's lawyer said that his client was only a passenger in the car. The driver applied brakes as there was sand on the road, he added. A court later granted him bail. —*PTI*

RTI REVEALS

MDA rents space to firm for only Rs 265

MYSURU, 27 MARCH

The Mysuru Development Authority (MDA) has sparked a row by allowing a private organisation to use its space to install antennas of mobile towers at a meagre monthly rent of Rs 265, when the nominal fee is reportedly between Rs 25,000 and Rs 1 lakh per month, often along with substantial advance payments.

An RTI query by activist BN Nagendra has revealed that the urban body have allowed a private player to use the rooftop of the MUDA Complex in Vijayanagar 1st stage to install antennas and use the space for 10 years.

A permission to this effect was issued by the then Mysore Urban Development Authority (now MDA) commissioner Dineshkumar according to the complainant. However, no formal agreement or records are available with MDA regarding this approval, and it was based on a "simple letter request".

- An RTI filed by activist BN Nagendra revealed that MDA allowed a private firm to rent out spaces for Rs 265 per month. The nominal fee is between Rs 25,000 and Rs 1 lakh

Compounding the gravity of the situation is a total lack of documentation.

While the authorisation was reportedly signed by Dineshkumar, the agency currently holds no formal contracts, lease agreements, or official records justifying the approval.

Furthermore, it is alleged that the MDA has failed to collect even the nominal rent for the past two years.

Nagendra demanded that the government order a probe in the lapses.

Speaking to Salar, MDA commissioner KR Rakshith said that he would verify the files and vowed to initiate serious action. —*Salar News*

Mother throws 3 kids in well, dies by suicide

VIJAYAPURA, 27 MARCH

A mother has killed her three minor children by throwing them into a well before jumping into it in Mirgi village of Indi taluk in Vijaypura district.

The incident occurred on the night of 26 March when the woman, Rajashree Shankarappa Hallur, 28, threw her children, Anushree 6; Tanu, 3; and Santosh, 1 into the well before killing herself.

The deceased woman's husband, Shankrappa, works as a private bus driver and was not in the village due to work at the time of the incident. The incident came to light when he returned home.

The police soon visited the spot for preliminary investigations.

The reason behind the woman taking such a drastic step remains unclear. It is yet to be determined whether there were family disputes or any form of mental stress involved that triggered the incident.

A case has been registered at the Indi Rural Police Station and the police are conducting further probe into the matter.

—*Salar News*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

— PTI

EC squad seizes ₹77 cr worth gold in Chennai

CHENNAI, 27 MARCH

The Election Commission's flying squad seized gold and silver jewellery valued at Rs 77.29 crore during a vehicle check in Ashok Nagar on the night of 26 March. Police said about 381 kg of jewellery was being transported when questioned, the driver explained that the vehicle normally used had a tyre burst, so the ornaments were shifted to another vehicle destined for jewellers. The goods were seized due to a lack of proper documentation, police added. The seizure took place under the T Nagar Assembly constituency, amid heightened election security. No further details were provided, but the incident highlights ongoing efforts to curb the illegal transport of valuables during elections. —*PTI*

Woman alleges sexual assault by Cong councillor

PALAKKAD, 27 MARCH

A woman has filed a complaint with Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and police, accusing Congress councillor Prashob C Valsan of sexual assault. The woman, from a Scheduled Tribe community, claimed she was sexually assaulted multiple times. She alleged she was first misbehaved with by the councillor's father at his shop. Prashob then befriended her and proposed a relationship, promising a full-time job. She accused him of coming to her room when her friend was absent and sexually assaulting her, including incidents near the district hospital and at a hotel. She also said he asked her to take pills to terminate her pregnancy. The case emerges amid criticism over sexual assault cases against MLA Rahul Mamkootathil. —*PTI*

Coal scam: Delhi court acquits ex-MP & 2 others

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

A special court acquitted former MP Vijay Darda, his son Devendra Darda, and ex-coal secretary H C Gupta in a case related to coal block allocation, citing lack of evidence. The case, which lasted over a decade, involved allegations of cheating and criminal conspiracy, with the CBI accusing the accused of conspiring with M/s AMR Iron and Steel Private Limited to submit false information for coal allocation. The court said, "the prosecution failed to prove charges of cheating and criminal conspiracy," and that "no witness corroborated claims of inducement or deception." The court noted that the relevant information was available during allocation, and no evidence linked the payments or letters to any misconduct. —*PTI*

Delhi Assembly gets third bomb threat in 3 days

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

The Delhi Assembly received its third bomb threat email in as many days, prompting a police investigation. Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta said police visited the Assembly on Friday to probe the emails received between 24 and 26 March, which threatened a blast. Gupta stated, "police officers visited the Assembly to investigate the emails," and assured prompt action. Security has been heightened, CCTV surveillance increased, and a computerised entry system has been implemented at entrances. Gupta added, "the police have assured prompt action and beefed-up security arrangements," emphasising the seriousness of the threats. —*PTI*

Govt's fuel duty cut due to elections, says Oppn

BJP says the duty is aimed at providing relief to commoners

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, 27 MARCH

The Opposition on Friday termed the Centre's excise cuts on fuel a "late move" taken with the upcoming elections in West Bengal, Assam, and other states in mind.

Meanwhile, the BJP said the excise cuts are aimed at providing relief to the common citizen. The government has slashed excise duty on petrol to Rs 3 per litre and exempted diesel fully from duty.

The Opposition also termed the Centre's initiative to hold a meeting with chief ministers on the West Asia conflict a delayed act, and stressed that wider consultations should have taken place earlier in the crisis.

TMC MP Sagarika Ghose criticised the government for "reactive" policymaking and questioned the timing of the decision.

Congress MP Tariq Anwar said the government should have acted earlier.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi alleged that the timing of the excise duty cut was linked to elections.

The government has slashed excise duty on petrol to Rs 3 per litre and exempted diesel fully from duty —*PTI*

RJD MP Abhay Kushwaha supported the decision and stressed the need for transparency and communication.

BJP leaders defended the government's approach and said it has consistently followed a consultative process during crises.

Additionally, Congress alleged that the excise cuts on petrol and diesel were because of Assembly polls and pointed out that consumer prices in India were not reduced even when global crude oil prices fell on seven different occasions in the past 12 years.

Congress General Secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "When global crude oil prices fell as they did on seven different occasions in the past 12 years consumer prices in India were not reduced."

> **On behalf of myself and my colleagues, I strongly condemn this unjust and illegal war imposed on Iran ... I also make a sincere appeal to our Prime Minister to use all available diplomatic channels and relationships to help end this war at the earliest.**
>
> - Omar Abdullah, J&K Chief Minister

Meanwhile, Senior TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee on Friday said there is a strong possibility that the BJP-led central government will increase the prices of cooking gas and transport fuel after the assembly elections are over.

He dared Modi and his ministers to make a promise at their election meetings that there would be no hike in the prices of fuel over the next five years. —*PTI*

2nd edition of Jan Vishwas Bill tabled in LS

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

The government on Friday introduced the second edition of the Jan Vishwas bill in the Lok Sabha seeking to amend certain provisions to decriminalise a host of minor offe nces to promote ease of doing business.

Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026, which was introduced by Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada, proposes to amend 79 central acts administered by 23 ministries.

A total of 784 provisions is being proposed to be amended, of which 717 provisions are being decriminalised to foster ease of doing business and 67 provisions are proposed to be changed to facilitate ease of living.

Congress Members K Kavya and GK Padavi opposed the introduction of the bill, stating that it infringes on the basic structure of the Indian Constitution by changing imprisonment for violations with fines.

Padavi urged the government to resend the bill to the select committee or a joint parliamentary committee.

As part of the Jan Vishwas bill, the government has proposed to amend the Motor Vehicle Act to allow a 30-day grace period after the expiry of a driving licence.

20 amendments are proposed under the act, with an aim to provide relaxation for some compliances under the Motor Vehicle law and resolve legal ambiguities. —*PTI*

Panel probing PM, CM removal bills get time

A Joint Parliamentary Committee examining three bills for the removal of the prime minister, chief ministers and ministers if they are under arrest for 30 consecutive days on serious charges has been given more time to submit its report. Lok Sabha on Friday granted the committee time till first day of the last week of the Monsoon Session of Parliament 2026. The committee is examining three bills — The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025; The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2025; and The Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Bill, 2025. —*PTI*

Adequate fertilisers available, says Nadda

Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister JP Nadda said that India has adequate fertilisers and that there is no need to panic. Replying to a question on what steps the government is taking to ensure availability amid the West Asia war, he said he spoke to state agriculture ministers on Thursday and informed them about availability of fertilisers. —*PTI*

RJD MP links Pahalgam attack and price surge

RJD MP Sanjay Yadav attacked airlines and private service providers for exploiting crises through surge pricing, citing the Pahalgam terrorist attack as a recent example, and demanded that the government take a firm stand against disaster profiteering. Raising the matter in the Rajya Sabha, Yadav invoked the Prime Minister's own slogan to make his point. —*PTI*

'Digital addiction claims 20,000 kids' lives a year'

TMC MP Derek O'Brien raised in the Rajya Sabha the issue of growing digital addiction among children, warning that approximately 20,000 children die by suicide every year as a consequence. He demanded that the government address the crisis urgently. He said studies indicate that youth are spending up to eight hours a day on screens. —*PTI*

Supriya Sule seeks probe in Ajit Pawar's death

NCP-SP leader Supriya Sule on Friday demanded a time-bound probe into the plane crash that killed former Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar and criticised the state government for not filing an FIR in the matter. Sule in Lok Sabha said that if a former deputy CM does not get justice, then how would others get? —*PTI*

KAVITHA'S NEW PARTY LAUNCH ON 25 APR

HYDERABAD, 27 MARCH

Telangana Jagruthi President **K Kavitha** on Friday said she would launch her new political party on 25 April with "Telangana-centric" issues as its main focus.

Speaking to reporters in Nizamabad, she said the name and flag of the party would be announced at 10am on 25 April at an event to be held at Muneerabad on the outskirts of Hyderabad.

She alleged negligence of people's issues, including farmers, by major parties. She said a new political force is needed in the state to achieve 'Sarvodaya Telangana' (progress of all).

"BRS lost focus when it gave up Telangana and announced a national foray. There is no regional party now. So, our Jagruthi would be the party of every household. It would be Telangana's regional party," she said adding her party's "95 per cent" focus will be on Telangana. —*PTI*

G7 meet: India, Canada discuss West Asia crisis

PARIS, 27 MARCH

The West Asia crisis and its consequences figured prominently during a conversation between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Canadian counterpart Anita Anand on the margins of a G7 meeting in France.

Jaishankar arrived here on Thursday for the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting.

On its sidelines, he met Anand, and the two followed up "on the partnership our Prime Ministers advanced during our visit to India earlier this year," the Canadian Foreign Minister said in an X post. They also discussed "trade, the situation in the Middle East, and key areas where we can deepen cooperation, including critical minerals, agriculture, and education," she said.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, in France, on Friday —*PTI*

At the two-day G7 meeting, Jaishankar will discuss the West Asia crisis with a focus on coordinating efforts to ensure that the Strait of Hormuz remains open for international shipping.

The narrow shipping lane between the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman handles roughly 20 per cent of global oil and LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas), and global oil and gas prices have surged after Iran virtually blocked it. —*PTI*

KERALA HC ASKS ECI

'What happens when candidate makes communal remarks?'

KOCHI, 27 MARCH

The Kerala High Court on Friday asked the ECI what happens when a candidate makes hate or communal remarks that cause harm to a community, society and the country.

The Court's query came during the hearing of a plea alleging inaction by Election Commission of India (ECI) against B Gopalakrishnan, BJP's candidate from Guruvayur assembly constituency, for his alleged communal remark in a campaign video. Justice Bechu Kurian Thomas disposed of petition with a direction to ECI to consider and pass needed orders on the representation received by KSU leader Gokul K.

The court directed that the representation be disposed of within two months from the date of its receipt by the Commission.

During the hearing, the ECI told the court that an FIR has been registered against the BJP leader on a complaint made by the Returning Officer and that the campaign video in question has been removed.

He has been booked under the BNS section 192 (wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riot) and section 125 (promoting enmity between classes in connection with election) of the Representation of the People Act. —*PTI*

Expelled IUML leader held over derogatory remarks

ALAPPUZHA, 27 MARCH

An expelled IUML leader, accused of making derogatory remarks against CPI(M) MLA U Prathibha, was arrested and released on bail in Kayamkulam here, police said on Friday.

Police said a case was registered against Irshad on Thursday after a complaint by Prathibha.

Irshad was taken into custody, and his arrest was recorded, officials said.

Police said that the ECI had directed registration of a case after finding that Irshad's remarks violated MCC.

Irshad, the UDF convener in Kayamkulam, allegedly said that Prathibha was "selling" her eloquence and beauty to win.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Friday rejected Congress' VD Satheesan's claim that he won in 1977 with RSS help.

Additionally, CPI(M) leader Elamaram Kareem said on Friday that IUML leader MK Muneer was not fielded in the Assembly elections due to the intervention of the Jamaat-e-Islami.

The CPI(M) has been alleging UDF and Jamaat-e-Islami link in poll campaign. IUML, said that Muneer stayed away from the electoral fray due to health reasons. —*PTI*

Meta removed Satheesan's interview by mistake, says EC

T'PURAM, 27 MARCH

The EC on Friday claimed that the entire video of Congress leader VD Satheesan's interview with a TV channel was removed by mistake, as the police only sought the removal of some comments linked to the video.

Kerala Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Rathan U Kelkar said that the police had asked Meta, which manages various social media platforms including Facebook, to remove the comments below the video.

Meanwhile, Satheesan alleged that Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan was behind the removal of the video as he was afraid of his interview. —*PTI*

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

TN BJP Chief Nainar to contest from Sattur

KANYAKUMARI/ CHENNAI, 27 MARCH

Tamil Nadu BJP Chief **Nainar Nagenthran** on Friday said that he would contest from Sattur Assembly constituency in Virudhunagar district in the 23 April elections to the state assembly.

He would be shifting from the Tirunelveli constituency, from where he won in the 2021 Assembly election. The decision, a senior BJP leader explained, is a strategy to expand BJP's presence in the state. In addition, Nagenthran is likely to migrate to another constituency.

AIADMK RELEASES SECOND LIST

The AIADMK released its second list of candidates in Chennai. It included, among others, Thachai N Ganesaraja from the Tirunelveli assembly constituency. With today's list, the party has nominated its candidates for 150 constituencies. Former state minister BV Ramana from Tiruvallur and sitting MLA, Pollachi V Jayaraman from Pollachi have been fielded.

NDA NAMES CANDIDATES

Two NDA constituents announced their candidates. One will contest on BJP's Lotus symbol and the other on AIADMK's Two Leaves. Former Union Minister GK Vasan named candidates for the five seats allotted to his TMC-M. The IJK, helmed by ex-MP Pariventhar, named its nominees for two Assembly segments.

TVK 'VIRTUAL WARRIOR'

Actress Ranjana Nachiyar, who joined the DMK recently, meanwhile claimed that she was targeted by the TVK "virtual warriors" for parting ways with the Vijay-led party and flayed Vijay for not censuring his party cadres.

TNCC TO CONTEST FROM 23 SEATS

TNCC President K Selvaperunthugai said the party has identified 23 constituencies for the Assembly elections. A final decision on five pending seats will be taken after negotiations with the DMK. —*PTI*

Ex-judge to move court against name removal

KOLKATA, 27 MARCH

Calcutta High Court's retired judge and West Bengal Waqf Board chairperson **Shahidullah Munshi** claimed that his name has been deleted after judicial scrutiny of the electoral rolls, and has decided to move an appellate tribunal.

The exclusion came to light after the publication of the first supplementary list of 'under-adjudication' voters on Monday.

Justice Munshi said the names of his wife and elder son continue to remain under adjudication.

The chairperson of the state Waqf Board also said he had appeared for the SIR hearing, submitted his passport and offered to provide his Aadhaar and PAN cards.

Meanwhile, the second supplementary list under the SIR of electoral rolls in West Bengal is likely to be published by 27-28 March, a senior Election Commission official said.

Additionally, a man engaged in poll duties was allegedly assaulted during a training session for election duty in West Bengal's Nadia district on Friday after he objected to the screening of a government advertisement, officials said.

Meanwhile, BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari on Friday held a Ram Navami procession in his constituency Nandigram in West Bengal's Purba Medinipur district, alleging that such rallies had earlier been attacked by TMC-backed goons in the area.

The elections to the 294-member West Bengal assembly will be held in two phases - on 23 and 29 April. Votes will be counted on 4 May. —*PTI*

Pak drone dropped 10kg heroin seized in Rajasthan

SRIGANGANAGAR, 27 MARCH

Authorities seized around 10kg of heroin dropped by a drone from across the Pakistan border, officials confirmed on Friday. Five individuals were arrested, with the heroin valued at approximately Rs 50 crore, said Ganganagar SP Harishankar. The consignment was dropped near village 2 KND on Thursday using a drone. Acting on intelligence, police and BSF launched a joint operation, cordoned the area, and intercepted three suspects — Gurpreet Singh, Kirtan Singh, and Sonu Singh from Punjab — while trying to flee. Two locals, Ranjit Singh and Ramesh, were also arrested. Preliminary investigations suggest an interstate drug trafficking network using drones to supply narcotics across the Indo-Pak border. —*PTI*

Smithsonian to return TN's stolen antique sculptures

WASHINGTON, 27 MARCH

The Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art (NMAA) will return three antique sculptures to India after research confirmed they were stolen from Tamil Nadu temples. India's Deputy Chief of Mission in the US, Namgya Khampa, signed an agreement with NMAA Director Chase Robinson for the artefacts: a 9th-century Shiva Nataraja bronze, a 12th-century sculpture of Shiva and Uma, and a 16th-century Saint Sundarar with Paravi. The museum found they were illegally removed following provenance research. The Shiva Nataraja will remain on loan for public viewing. The sculptures were part of Arthur M Sackler's collection, with provenance confirmed by research at the French Institute of Pondicherry.—*PTI*

KBC winner held in Rs 2.6 crore flood scam

SHEOPUR, 27 MARCH

Madhya Pradesh tehsildar Amita Singh Tomar, who gained fame after winning Rs 50 lakh on KBC, was arrested over a Rs 2.5 crore flood relief scam. Arrested Thursday in Gwalior, she is accused of irregularities in 2021 flood relief funds in Baroda tehsil, now lodged in Shivpuri jail. A police team led by SDOP Avneet Sharma detained her at her home in Chandravadni Naka. Tomar, previously Vijaypur tehsildar, had her anticipatory bail rejected by the high court and Supreme Court. The case involves around 22 patwaris and one tehsildar, with Rs 2.5 crore allegedly transferred into fake bank accounts illegally. The investigation into the case is going on. —*PTI*

— *PTI*

'Dhurandhar: The Revenge' collects Rs 1,088 crore

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Aditya Dhar's "Dhurandhar: The Revenge" has grossed Rs 1,088 crore globally in its first week, making it a blockbuster. The film, starring Ranveer Singh, collected Rs 814 crore in India and Rs 274 crore overseas, with a net Indian collection of Rs 690 crore. The makers stated it set all-time records, including the fastest run to Rs 1000 crore worldwide. Opening weekend earnings were Rs 761 crore globally, with Rs 145 crore earned in India on opening day. The film, released on March 19 in multiple languages, follows Singh's character in Karachi's underworld, and is produced by Jyoti Deshpande and Lokesh Dhar. —*PTI*

Lockdown rumours false, no such proposal: Govt

Govt ensuring adequate fuel supply, says Oil Minister

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Amid speculation regarding a lockdown in India due to the West Asia crisis, the Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, dismissed the claims, stating that there is "no such move under consideration by the Centre."

Puri said the attempts to spread rumours and create panic were "irresponsible and harmful."

"The global situation remains in a flux, and we are closely monitoring developments across energy, supply chains, and essential commodities. India has consistently demonstrated resilience in the face of global uncertainties, and we will continue to act in a timely, proactive, and coordinated manner," he said on X. He also said that all steps are being taken to ensure the uninterrupted availability of fuel, energy and other critical supplies. "We are fully prepared to handle all challenges," he said.

Consumers crowd at a petrol station amid rumours of fuel shortages in Maharashtra's Thane on Friday —*PTI*

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also dismissed reports that the government could consider a lockdown-like measure. "I want to reassure people that there will not be any lockdown. I am surprised that some leaders are saying there will be a lockdown and there will be shortages of fuel. These are baseless. Such remarks coming from those in political domains are worrisome. There will be no lockdown as we saw during Covid," she said. She said the main aim of excise duty cuts for petrol and diesel was to insulate consumers from the rising price of crude due to the war.

The reduction comes amid a global energy crisis due to the US-Israel attack on Iran and the Tehran-imposed blockade on the Strait of Hormuz in West Asia. — *PTI*

30 booked, 4 held after clash over fuel sales

Uttar Pradesh Police have booked 30 persons and arrested four individuals following a violent dispute over fuel distribution at a petrol pump in the Mohanganj area here, officials said on Friday.
The incident occurred on Wednesday at the Sundari petrol pump, they said. Eyewitnesses reported that tension began when petrol pump staff allegedly refused to sell fuel to some customers while providing it to others in containers, police said. —*PTI*

Married man can have consensual live-in, says HC

PRAYAGRAJ, 27 MARCH

A married man cannot be prosecuted for having a consensual, live-in relationship with an adult woman, the Allahabad High Court said in a statement recently as it heard a criminal writ petition filed by a live-in couple from Uttar Pradesh's Shahjahanpur. The couple had sought the quashing of a police case, filed by the woman's mother, against them.

The court underlined the separation of 'morality' and the law and said that in the latter's book, no prima facie offence is seen to have been committed by the man, and that the live-in relationship with the adult woman appeared consensual.

The court also stressed its actions to protect citizens' rights could not be dictated by social opinion or morality.

The court directed the police not to arrest the petitioner couple and also restrained all members of the female petitioner's family from harming the couple.

The court said family members could not enter the couple's home or attempt to contact them – directly, via electronic communication, or through a third party. The court held the local police chief personally responsible for the petitioners' safety and security.

The matter has been scheduled for further hearing on 8 April.

The order regarding police protection and protection from arrest was passed by the Division Bench of Justice JJ Munir and Justice Tarun Saxena.

The petition was filed by one Anamika and Netrapal. — *PTI*

'People of all creeds, castes can visit Yamunotri Dham'

UTTARKASHI, 27 MARCH

The management committee of Yamunotri Dham, one of the Char Dhams located in the Garhwal Himalayas of Uttarakhand, has decided that everyone coming to the temple with devotion will be allowed to visit irrespective of religion and caste.

Yamunotri Temple Committee spokesperson Purushottam Uniyal said, "Everyone coming on the Char Dham Yatra is a Sanatani and we have decided that whoever comes with devotion on the Yamunotri Dham Yatra will be welcomed in the tradition of 'Atithi Devo Bhava' (Guest is God)."

No devotee will be asked about his religion or caste at Yamunotri, and he will be given darshan of Goddess Yamuna, he added.

Earlier, conditional entry for non-followers of 'Sanatan Dharma' was allowed in Badrinath Dham, Kedarnath Dham and Gangotri Dham.

Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee Chairman Hemant Dwivedi said that if any non-Hindu gives an affidavit of his faith in Sanatan Dharma, he will be allowed to visit the temples.

The Yamunotri Dham will welcome all devotees regardless of their religion or caste, as per the 'Atithi Devo Bhava' tradition —*PTI*

At the same time, the Gangotri Temple Committee has announced that non-Sanatanists will be allowed entry into the temple only after consuming Panchagavya (a prasad made by mixing cow dung, cow urine, milk, curd and ghee).

This year, the Char Dham Yatra will begin on 19 April, on the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya, with the opening of the doors of Gangotri and Yamunotri shrines in the Uttarkashi district.

The doors of the Badrinath shrine will open on 23 April and those of the Kedarnath shrine will open on 22 April for pilgrims. — *PTI*

'MINORITY RIGHTS INFRINGED'

FCRA Bill: Catholic body flays 'undue interference'

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) has expressed "grave concern" over the proposed amendments to the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, describing the Bill introduced in the Lok Sabha as "dangerous and alarming."

The CBCI said on Thursday that the proposed changes, "brought under the pretext of licence renewal," could enable "executive overreach" into constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, raising serious concerns about "undue interference" in minority institutions.

The CBCI objected to provisions that would empower the Centre as the licensing authority to deny renewal or cancel licences and, through a newly proposed mechanism, assume control over institutions, funds, properties and assets of NGOs and minority bodies.

"Such measures are unacceptable and raise serious concerns regarding fairness, transparency, and accountability," it said.

The CBCI also questioned the "intent" behind introducing the Bill in Parliament, alleging that it was done unilaterally despit e protests from opposition MPs. It called for wider consultation and deliberation on issues affecting fundamental rights. According to the statement, provisions enabling the Centre to take control of foreign funds and assets of organisations upon expiry of their FCRA registration are "undemocratic and against natural justice."

The FCRA (Regulation) Bill, 2026, introduced in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, tightens oversight of foreign-funded organisations, and proposes a new authority to manage the assets of non-profit bodies who lose their licence. — *PTI*

Duo rams protesters with car in Indore, woman killed

INDORE, 27 MARCH

A man and his son allegedly drove their car into a group of protesters, killing a lady techie and critically injuring another woman during a dispute over the commercial use of their penthouse in Indore, police said.

"Shampa Pathak Pandey, a mother of two, died on Thursday at a hospital," Additional DCP Rajesh Dandotiya said on Friday.

He said the incident took place around 10.30 pm on Wednesday when residents protested against penthouse owners Kuldeep Chaudhary, 42, and his son Mohit Chaudhary, 18, for allegedly using their premises for short-term rentals. During the argument, the accused allegedly drove their car into the group, he said.

The vehicle first hit a woman and then ran over Pandey, who suffered severe head injuries. "Kuldeep and Mohit were arrested on Thursday. Both have been booked for murder," Dandotiya said, adding that a probe into the case is underway. — *PTI*

20 HELD AFTER RAM NAVAMI CLASH

GARWAH, 27 MARCH

Twenty people were arrested on Friday in connection with a clash between two groups over a minor issue during a Ram Navami procession in Jharkhand's Garwah district, a senior official said.

The incident took place on Thursday night near THE Kauwakho Shiv Chaturtra area when a group from a particular community objected to the hoisting of a religious flag and bursting of firecrackers during the Mahashtami day of Ram Navami, officials said.

An altercation over the issue soon turned violent, with both sides started throwing stones at each other despite efforts by police to pacify them, officials said, adding that police used mild force to disperse the mob.

Several persons, including policemen, sustained injuries in the incident, they said.

"Based on CCTV footage, police have identified the miscreants, including those leading the mob involved in stone-pelting, and arrested 20 people," Sub-Divisional Officer (Ranka) Rudra Pratap said.

He said additional police units have been deployed in and around the area to control violence and maintain law and order. — *PTI*

SIT gets 50 calls about arrested Nashik 'godman'

PALGHAR/PUNE, 27 MARCH

The SIT investigating rape accused self-styled godman Ashok Kharat received around 50 calls in the last five days providing info or reporting crimes allegedly committed by him, officials said on Friday. The Maharashtra government-appointed SIT had published two phone numbers for citizens to provide information regarding Kharat.

Kharat was arrested on 18 March after a 35-year-old woman accused him of rape.

Meanwhile, police registered a case against another godman from Palghar district named Hrishikesh Vaidya, 40, for allegedly raping a 35-year-old Pune woman. — *PTI*

CJI writes to HCs urging speedy filling of vacant posts

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant has written to the chief justices of high courts to speed up the filling of judicial vacancies with special focus on the elevation of women judges for ensuring diversity in the benches.

Sources said the CJI wrote to the chief justices of 25 high courts last week and highlighted the vacancies of judges in the higher judiciary and the need to increase the representation of women.

The CJI, who had earlier flagged the poor representation of women judges, also asked the chief justices not to delay the recommendation of collegiums and to take steps for filling the vacancies even vacancies arise.

On 8 March, CJI Kant called for greater institutional reforms in the judiciary to bring more women into the legal field and said that high court collegiums should consider meritorious women members of the bar for judgeship.

The CJI requested high court collegiums to widen the zone of their consideration and include women advocates from their states who are practising in the Supreme Court for elevation.

He had highlighted that many women are serving as chief justices of different high courts, and the Punjab and Haryana High Court has 18 women judges. Similarly, the Madras and Bombay High Courts also have about a dozen female judges each, he had said.

CJI Kant had also pointed out that women comprise approximately 36.3 per cent of the strength of judicial officers at the district level.

"Friends, this is not a simple statistic; I would argue it reflects a generational shift. If we speak of a pipeline, it is here that it is widening. And when the base reflects greater inclusion, it is only a matter of time before that strength finds expression in the higher judiciary," he had said. — PTI

LITERARY HONOURS

Arundhati's autobiography bags US book critic award

WASHINGTON, 27 MARCH

Indian author Arundhati Roy's autobiography 'Mother Mary Comes to Me' won a prize in the autobiography section of the National Book Critics Circle awards.

A novel by Nobel laureate Han Kang, Karen Hao's examination of artificial intelligence and OpenAI (the company behind ChatGPT) were among the other award winners.

Han's 'We Do Not Part,' translated by E. Yaewon and Paige Aniyah Morris, addresses a 1948-1949 uprising on Jeju, an island south of the Korean mainland, in which thousands were killed.

Arundhati Roy —*PTI*

Heather Scott Partington, who chaired the awards' fiction committee, described the novel as "a work of blinding melancholy, bleak weather, and murmuring syntax" and said it "lingers like an atmospheric and arresting dream."

The lifetime achievement award went to author and journalist Frances FitzGerald, whose 1972 'Fire in the Lake' was an early take on the Vietnam War.

NPR and PBS were presented with the achievement award honouring institutions that have made significant contributions to book culture.

"At a time when some question the value of service-minded media, we salute PBS and NPR for all you have done for American democracy," said Jacob M. Appel, who chaired the selection process. — *PTI*

Police inspect the site after a bus collided with a tipper and caught fire, in the Rayavaram village of Andhra— PTI

DNA profiling to identify Andhra bus fire victims

RAYAVARAM, 27 MARCH

The bodies of those who died in the Andhra Pradesh bus fire will be handed over to their families after DNA profiling, with samples from 14 bodies sent to the Forensic Science Laboratory.

A senior police official confirmed reports are awaited. The incident, which occurred on Thursday morning in Markapuram district, resulted in 14 deaths and several injuries when a private travel bus collided with a tipper lorry and caught fire. The accident happened between 5.30am and 6am near Rayavaram village on Podili road, after the bus rammed into a dumper truck, causing a massive blaze. The bus was travelling from Jagityal, Telangana, to Kaligiri, Nellore district. The samples were urgently collected to establish identity, as severe burns hinder visual identification. — *PTI*

Irish tourist dies in Ranthambore after safari

JAIPUR, 27 MARCH

An Irish tourist, Mariam Francis, 40, died in her hotel in Sawai Madhopur after visiting the Ranthambore National Park.

She arrived with friends on 25 March 25 and went on safari twice. Late that night, she suddenly fell ill. The hotel staff was informed, and she was taken to hospital, where doctors declared her dead.

The police confirmed her death and stated that the Irish embassy has requested an autopsy.

Francis was staying in the hotel during her visit to the tiger reserve. Her friends and hotel staff are cooperating with authorities, and investigations are underway. — *PTI*

KANYA POOJA

Young girls dressed as goddesses are offered food during 'Kanya Pooja' on the ninth day of Navaratri in Varanasi on Friday. Navaratri is a nine-day festival dedicated to Goddess Durga and marks the Hindu New Year. This year, it was observed from 19 March to 27 March —*PTI*

Tradition meets tech in Kerala's poll campaign

A wall writing that reads, "Cast your vote for AK Saseendran on the 'charkha' symbol", shown in the Malayalam film Mela, released in 1980, is now becoming a major talking point on social media.

The visual in the KG George-directed movie is from a village that fell under the Peringalam Assembly constituency in north Kerala.

As 80-year-old Saseendran, NCP (SP) leader and State Forest Minister, contests from his sitting seat of Elathur in the 9 April Assembly polls, the old wall writing urging voters to support him in the 1980 election is reminding many how a simple message from another era still echoes in people's memories.

Thomas A, a retired school-teacher in Kannur, said he still remembers Saseendran's election campaign in 1980.

"People did not know him well then, but his campaign was unique, with banners and wall paintings. Subsequently, he emerged victorious," he said.

With around two weeks remaining until the polls, Kerala's walls transform into vibrant canvases filled with colourful calligraphy and graffiti that capture public attention.

But behind these striking artworks is a shrinking community of skilled artists who, despite being in high demand during elections, are now on the verge of decline.

The issue has gained fresh attention this election after a Congress candidate for the Palakkad Assembly seat, Ramesh Pisharody, deployed a robot to write on a wall.

However, artists say technology is not an immediate threat, as such machines cannot replace human creativity.

"If you take Tripunithura, Thrikkakara and Ernakulam constituencies alone, there are hardly five to six artists engaged in professional calligraphy and graffiti work during the election period.

"Every election, we do at least 600 to 700 calligraphy works for candidates. This time, with less campaign duration, artists are working on a tight schedule," said Shaji, an artist from Nettoor here.

He said the decline is not due to a lack of income, but also due to poor recognition.

"I think in the last 20 years, no new people have entered this field, at least in Ernakulam district. The decline began with the advent of flex boards in the late 1990s. Unlike other sectors where migrant workers can be employed, wall writing is an art form, and they can only assist due to language barriers," he said.

Shaji, also known as Sha Nettoor, has worked for candidates across political fronts, including VD Satheesan and Deepak Joy of the Congress and KJ Maxi of the CPI(M).

He added that artists are evolving to stay relevant.

"We now create graffiti portraits of candidates. Also, 3D images and writings are made to make wall paintings more attractive. We keep updating with new techniques," he said.

Ayyappankutty, a Kakkanad-based artist with over 40 years of experience, echoed similar concerns.

"I have worked for all major candidates in the district. There is a severe shortage, especially during elections. Nowadays, work starts early in the morning and continues till dusk," he said.

According to him, a basic wall painting takes about 15-20 minutes. "For paintings that include a candidate's image and 3D lettering, it takes around two hours. For normal wall writing, we charge Rs 500-700 depending on the size of the wall," he said.

During non-election periods, artists continue to find work in painting homes, schools and government buildings.

"Elections are hectic, but we get a steady income even during non-election periods. Artists are always in demand," he added.

Meanwhile, Palakkad-based Tevanova Techtrade Pvt Ltd introduced an automated wall-writing device, "Chuvarbot", for use in Pisharody's campaign.

The computerised numerical control (CNC)-based device operates on a ramp and can execute wall writing and drawings in minimal time. The company is yet to patent the product and is continuing development. "We carried out testing of the device by doing the wall painting in Palakkad. The full-fledged operation has not yet started. It is still under development," CEO Shakkib Geethanjali told PTI.

KSU leader Nikhil, who is coordinating Pisharody's campaign, said only one wall was painted using the machine.

"A majority of wall writings were done by artists. However, it is very difficult to find artists as they are working on tight schedules for different candidates across constituencies," he said.

Shaji, however, maintains that there is no threat in introducing machines for wall paintings & calligraphy. —*PTI*

CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat during a rally ahead of the Kerala Assembly elections, in Thiruvananthapuram —*PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR

Slave trade gravest crime against humanity, says UN

The resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 March, 2026, seeking recognition of the transatlantic slave trade as the "gravest crime against humanity", potentially creates a broader definition of crimes against humanity in international law and allows for restitution claims against perpetrators.

The resolution could elevate the legal and moral standard for what counts as the worst crimes against humanity, and compel more people to legally pursue reparations or compensation cases and thus deter such crimes.

Proposed by Ghana, it was adopted with 123 votes. The US, Israel and Argentina voted against it. Fifty-two countries abstained, among them the UK and European states.

There has never been a single "gravest crime" designation applied to one human event or condition. Instead, international law defines categories of crimes considered the most serious.

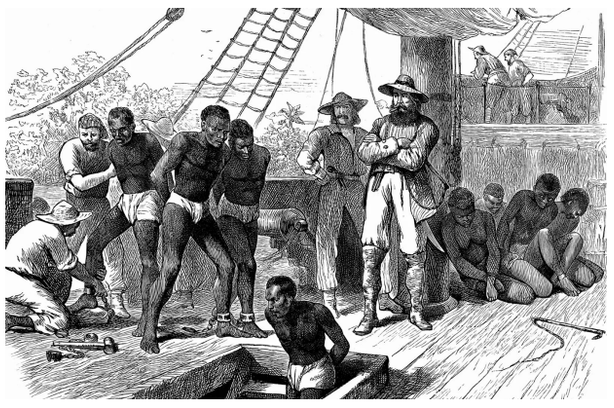
Examples are genocide, war crimes, crimes of aggression, and crimes against humanity. Being classified under these categories triggers severe legal consequences. These include global prosecution, lifelong accountability, international sanctions, and reparation claims.

Ghana's declaration views transatlantic slavery and its system of forced African labour as the worst crime ever committed. It explains how millions of Africans were abducted, treated like property, and abused because of their race.

The declaration points out that the effects of slavery still influence inequality and racism today. It calls on all nations to recognise what happened, teach their history honestly, and remember the victims. It also works towards fixing the lasting damage, including institutional and monetary reparations.

Ghana's resolution represents more than a moral or diplomatic statement.

More importantly, it insists that recognition must lead to action.



An illustration of captive Africans being transferred to ships along the Slave Coast for the transatlantic slave trade in 1880 —*BRITANNICA*

SLAVERY SHAPED THE MODERN WORLD

Transatlantic slaving was not an isolated historical episode but a foundational process that made the modern world. Between the 15th and 19th centuries, over 12 million Africans were forcibly removed from their homelands. It was a massive, organised system of theft that left African societies dealing with long-term demographic, political and economic disruptions.

During the 1800s, slavery changed form. It became tied to European imperialism. Powerful nations such as Britain and France took over land in Africa and other regions. The countries that had been major slave traders became the leading imperial powers in Africa.

THE CREATION OF DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

Over the course of transatlantic slaving, Africans participated, resisted, adapted, and preserved cultural and intellectual systems that would later shape diaspora communities and their bonds with Africa.

Those bonds included shared historical experiences, cultural practices, religious systems, political ideas and intellectual traditions that travelled and transformed across the ocean.

Ghana's resolution comes out of a convergence of continental and diaspora political efforts. African states and Caribbean nations have increasingly coordinated their positions on historical injustice and reparations.

Ghana's resolution was built on earlier declarations:

- The Abuja Proclamation of 1993. It formally recognised that a moral debt is owed to the peoples of Africa for slavery and colonisation.
- The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, tabled at the UN in 2001. In it, transatlantic slaving was acknowledged as a crime against humanity.

The Ghana declaration sets a precedent.

WHY IT MATTERS

The Ghana declaration recognises the centrality of transatlantic slavery and compels a reassessment of how modern inequalities are explained and addressed.

For contemporary Africa, this recognition carries material implications. The aftermath of transatlantic slaving is evident in patterns of underdevelopment, external dependency and unequal integration into global markets. A formal recognition at the highest level of international governance strengthens the basis for claims to reparatory justice.

Such claims may take multiple forms. These may include investment in infrastructure, education and health systems. There could also be reforms to global financial institutions that boost mobilising resources within African borders.

Equally significant is the resolution's role in consolidating pan-African and diasporic solidarity. By aligning African states with Caribbean nations and broader diaspora communities, it reactivates a political consciousness rooted in shared histories and strategic alignments.

A unified transatlantic African bloc possesses greater leverage within – and outside – international institutions and can more effectively advocate for systemic transformation.

The Ghana resolution also functions as a global educational intervention. Public understanding of transatlantic slaving often remains fragmented or minimised. This is true particularly in regions where some groups or historical individuals benefited from it.

RESISTANCE LIES AHEAD

The resolution will face resistance. Some nations, such as the US and Great Britain, remain wary of the legal and financial implications of a "gravest crime" recognition. The subject of reparations for them is contentious and untenable. These tensions reveal enduring asymmetries in global power and the difficulty of translating moral or historical claims into enforceable outcomes.

Yet resistance itself underscores the resolution's significance. It exposes the extent to which historical injustices remain embedded in contemporary political and economic power arrangements. —*PTI*

Balen Shah: Rapper-turned Gen Z icon is now Nepal's youngest PM

A rapper, a structural engineer, Gen Z icon and the youngest democratically elected prime minister of Nepal, Balen Shah, a man of many firsts, created history on Friday after taking the oath to serve at the top executive post of the Himalayan nation.

The 35-year-old is also the first person from the Madhes region to become the 47th prime minister of the nation.

Balen's unique style and ability to connect to the Gen Z of the country, which toppled the KP Sharma Oli-led coalition government in September last year in a violent protest, made him the lead runner in the election.

He defeated four-time prime minister Oli, the chair of Nepal's legacy party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) — CPN-UML — by a huge margin of about 50,000 votes in Jhapa-5 constituency.

Named among the 'Top 100 Emerging Leaders of 2023' by Time magazine, Balen rose to fame while working as the Kathmandu Metropolitan City Mayor.

He is credited ith implementing sweeping reform programmes and the beautification of the metropolis.

Sudip Manandha, a young musician based in Kathmandu, who had closely watched Balen as a rapper, said, "Balen won the hearts of thousands of youths through his rap songs that usually hit the existing system in our society. He used to sing satirical songs portraying social anomalies, exposing corruption and political mismanagement."

It was perhaps this popularity that the young leader capitalised to enter politics and successfully contested the 2022 mayoral polls with his campaign slogan for 'change', targeting youngsters, most of them his followers on his social media platforms, who were getting fed up with traditional parties' musical chair politics.

No wonder, when Oli banned social media in Nepal in 2025, Balen was amongst the prominent voices to protest the move.

"In a city still reeling from a deadly 2015 earthquake, Shah's campaign promises were simple but offered desperately needed fixes: better waste disposal and sanitation, safe drinking water, clean roads, and the preservation of cultural heritage alongside urban development," the magazine said.

Naveen Manandhar, ward chairman of ward 17 in the Kathmandu Metropolis, recalled the "good governance and transparency" that Balen introduced in the Kathmandu Metropolitan City during his three-and-a-half-year tenure.

Nepal President Ram Chandra Poudel administers the oath of office to Balendra Shah as Prime Minister of Nepal, during a swearing-in ceremony, at the President's residence, in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Friday —*PTI*

In January, he joined the newly formed RSP, led by Ravi Lamichhane, and was soon declared the party's prime ministerial candidate.

Born in Kathmandu in a family originally from Madhes province, Balen is the youngest son of Ram Narayan Shah, an Ayurved practitioner, and Dhruvadevi Shah, a homemaker. He was keen on music and poetry from a young age and turned to rap music during his education days.

After completing a Civil Engineering degree from Kathmandu, Balen did his Master's in Structural Engineering from the Visvesvaraya Technological University (VTU) in Karnataka.

He married Sabina Kafle in 2018, and the couple has a 2023-born daughter.

Balen's official YouTube page (@BalenShah with 'Rapper, Lyricist, Music Composer' as his description) lists about a million subscribers.

Balen released his first single song, 'Sadak Balak', in 2012, when he was one year short of his matriculation. The very next year, he participated in a YouTube battle rap series, gaining widespread recognition across Nepal's music lovers.

He listed beautification of the capital by dismantling illegal structures, prioritising health, education and employment generation and allotting a specific number of free beds to poor people in different hospitals and health centres within the metropolis among his works.

"Apart from that, Balen introduced skill-oriented extra-curricular activities in the schools within Kathmandu metropolis.

Under his leadership, the Kathmandu metropolis introduced vocational training in different areas, which benefited around 60,000 to 70,000 youths within a couple of years, helping them to get employment in different fields," Manandhar said.

However, Balen's mayoral tenure was not without controversy. "He faced flak due to widespread demolitions in the capital. He was also accused of not sending a fire brigade when Gen Z protesters resorted to arson," said a critique.

Identified by his signature dark goggles and black blazer, Balen also carried a small metal bell, the RSP symbol, to his rallies and used it to warn the opposition.

Immediately after he joined the RSP, Balen chose to address a public meeting, calling it a 'Parivartan Udghosh Sabha' (Change Declaration Gathering) in Janakpur and spoke in Maithili to highlight his personal connection with the Madhes province.

His party manifesto promised online government service delivery to be provided to the people and building a neutral, professional and accountable public service system by disassociating bureaucracy from politics. —*PTI*

—PTI

Putin turns to oligarchs to fund Ukraine war

MOSCOW, 27 MARCH

President Vladimir Putin has reportedly asked Russia's oligarchs to donate to the country's shrinking defence budget to sustain its Ukraine invasion. President Putin aims to continue the conflict until Moscow secures remaining parts of Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, according to the Financial Times. At least two businessmen have expressed willingness to contribute following talks on Thursday. Putin is believed to press ahead after Ukraine refused to withdraw unilaterally from Donbas during recent US-brokered negotiations. Meanwhile, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that US security guarantees depend on Kyiv ceding Donbas. —*Agencies*

Senate approves funding for TSA but not ICE

WASHINGTON, 27 MARCH

US Senate on Friday approved funds for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and most Homeland Security agencies, excluding immigration enforcement (ICE). The deal, passed unanimously without a roll call, now moves to the House. Senate Majority Leader John Thune said, "We can get at least a lot of the government opened up again and then we'll go from there," although he acknowledged further work remains. President Trump announced he would sign an order to pay TSA agents immediately to stop airport chaos. The package funds agencies like FEMA, the Coast Guard, and TSA but excludes Immigration and Customs Enforcement. —*PTI*

Syria should probe Druze clashes that killed 1,700: UN

BEIRUT, 27 MARCH

A UN inquiry has stated there is "no indication" that Syria has investigated violations by its forces during last summer's sectarian clashes in which at least 1,700 people died, mostly from the Druze community. The UN Independent Commission of Inquiry urged Syria's government to investigate its security leadership, accused of enabling sectarian attacks. About 200,000 were displaced in Sweida, with almost 200 women and children among the dead. The report describes "widespread looting and systematic burning," with bodies found months later, some burned or mutilated. It highlights targeted attacks on Druze sites, villages, and civilians, including children and the elderly. The violence overwhelmed hospitals, with bodies left outside, scavenged by animals, and some buried before identification, the report added. —*PTI*

Pak halts Afghan deportation after cross-border firing

PESHAWAR, 27 MARCH

Pakistan suspended the deportation of undocumented Afghan nationals via Torkham after a security official was injured in cross-border firing. The incident on Thursday at a border check-post near Torkham, shortly after the border crossing was reopened to for stranded Afghan citizens. About 220 undocumented Afghan refugees had been repatriated on Thursday before operations had stopped. Security forces are on high alert due to the deteriorating security situation and "aggressive behaviour" from the Afghan side. The Torkham border crossing has been closed since 26 February amid Operation Ghazab lil-Haq, Pakistan's military offensive against the Afghan Taliban. —*PTI*

Balen Shah sworn in as Nepal's 47th PM

KATHMANDU, 27 MARCH

2 LAKH VOTES PER 1 MINUTE OF SPEECH

Balen delivered only 26 minutes of speeches during the campaign, but secured 52 lakh votes.

Rapper-turned-politician Balendra 'Balen' Shah was sworn in as Nepal's Prime Minister on Friday. Balen, the former mayor of Kathmandu, is the youngest person to be democratically elected as PM of the Himalayan nation. His oath comes only six months after KP Sharma Oli was ousted from office during September's Gen Z protest.

The 35-year-old Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) leader was appointed as the 47th PM by President Ram Chandra Paudel in accordance with Article 76(1) of the Constitution.

The swearing-in ceremony at the President's Office featured a blend of Hindu and Buddhist traditions. It was held at the auspicious time of 12.34pm, chosen for its lucky '1-2-3-4' sequence.

Balen is the first democratically elected PM since the Gen Z protests against corruption, nepotism, and a social media ban that escalated into violence.

After Oli's ouster, former chief justice Sushila Karki became interim prime minister. Balen, a popular choice for the role, declined, preferring a full term. He defeated Oli' UML party in the 5 March general elections.

Apart from Balen, Swarnim Wagle took the oath as Minister of Finance, Shisir Khanal as Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Sudan Gurung as Minister for Home Affairs. Balen will hold the portfolios for Defence Ministry and Industry, Commerce and Supplies Ministry. —*PTI*

Nepal's newly appointed PM Balen Shah hugs interim head Sushila Karki at his swearing-in ceremony in Kathmandu on Friday —PTI

US halts strikes on Iran's energy sites for 10 days

Israel says it will escalate strikes; Iran rebuts sending Pak oil to US

DUBAI, 27 MARCH

US President Donald Trump gave Iran another 10 days to reopen the Strait of Hormuz or face the destruction of its energy plants, claiming that their talks are going well.

However, Israel threatened to "escalate and expand" its attacks on Iran on Friday, while Tehran rejected Trump's 15-point ceasefire proposal.

In his second extension, Trump said Iran must open the Strait to all traffic by 6 April.

Iran responded by saying that hotels in several Gulf countries which have US troops are legitimate targets and reiterated that it would strike desalination plants and energy facilities in the region.

The IRGC also dismissed Trump's earlier claim that Iran had sent ten Pakistani-flagged oil tankers to the US. Trump claimed that Tehran "gifted" Washington the oil as a sign of goodwill during the negotiations, saying "we're dealing with the right people".

However, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said in a statement that the Strait was closed the enemies.

Meanwhile, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said Iran "will pay heavy, increasing prices" as the military said it has been intercepting missiles on a daily basis.

"Attacks in Iran will escalate and expand to additional targets and areas that assist the regime in building and operating weapons against Israeli citizens," he said.

Meanwhile, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told the United Nations Security Council that the that the strike on the Minab elementary school that killed at least 170 people was a "deliberate, intentional" act by the US and Israel. The UNSC called for an investigation into the strikes on 28 February.

Meanwhile, US Vice President JD Vance justified the US-Israeli strikes, by making the claim that that Iran would have otherwise trained suicide bombers to wear nuclear-armed vests. —*PTI*

WEST ASIA WAR

DAY-28

It's still hard to predict the consequences of the conflict in the Middle East with any confidence. It seems to me that even those involved in the conflict are themselves unable to foresee them

—Vladimir Putin, Russian President

We have so much oil. Our country is not affected by this. We have more, we have twice the amount of oil as Saudi Arabia or Russia, and soon it'll be three times the amount

—Donald Trump, US President

From outset of this war, US soldiers fled military bases in GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) to hide in hotels and offices. They use GCC citizens as human shield

—Seyed Abbas Araghchi, Iranian Foreign Minister

Israel must remember, Pakistan is no Qatar. We will beat hell out of them if any harm occurred to our diplomats, anywhere in the world

—Pakistan Strategic Forum warns Israel

Iran released images of missiles with a message thanking India, Pak, Germany and Spain —PRESSTV

1,900 people have been killed in Iran, likely an undercount.

1,100 people killed in Lebanon

82,000 civilian buildings, including hospitals and the homes of 1,80,000 people have been damaged in Iran so far

3 million displaced in Iran (3% of population)

1 million displaced in Lebanon

Risk of leaks as Israel hits Iran nuke site: IAEA

The International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi said that there was a risk of "a major radiological accident affecting a large area in Iran and beyond" after Israel hit Iran's Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant again on Tuesday. Grossi noted that the site was an "operating nuclear power plant with a large amount of nuclear material".

UAE, allies to open Hormuz: Report

DUBAI, 26 MARCH

UAE told the US and Western allies that it would send its maritime forces to help open the Strait of Hormuz, according to a report. This comes as Iran appears to the be setting up a "toll booth" on the crucial waterway.

The UAE is trying to push dozens of countries to create a "Hormuz Security Force" to defend the strait from Iranian attacks and escort shipping, the Financial Times added, citing sources. Notably, the UAE has faced more Iranian attacks than any other country, including Israel, since the war began.

Around a fifth of the world's oil passed through the Strait, but traffic has slowed by 90 per cent since the start of the war. UAE was also among the worst hit, as 90 per cent of its LNG export pass through the Strait, while it has cut over half of its oil exports since the war.

Notably, dozens of countries have refused to send ships to forcibly open the Strait, against Trump's demands.

Meanwhile, Iran is reportedly charging Chinese yuan in its "toll booth". The toll itself, which the Iranian Parliament is reportedly formalising, appears to be against international law. —*Agencies*

CIA BELIEVES MOJTABA IS GAY: TRUMP

US President Trump said the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) informed him that Iran's new Supreme Leader, **Mojtaba Khamenei**, is gay.

In Iran, homosexuality is illegal and is considered a violation of Islamic values, with punishments governed under Sharia-based laws.

Previous reports had suggested that Trump couldn't stop laughing when he was told that Mojtaba was allegedly gay.

Trump also went on a tirade against Palestinians. "I sort of have to smile to myself when I see people trying to defend the Palestinian regime for women — women for Palestine. But they kill women if you don't… wear certain clothes," Trump said. "When I look at 'Gays for Palestine,' but they kill gays… they throw them off buildings". —*Agencies*

'MANPOWER SHORTAGE COULD COLLAPSE IDF'

Chief of Staff of Isreal's Defence Forces (IDF), **Lt Gen Eyal Zamir** warned that the Israeli military could "collapse in on itself" due to increasing operational pressures and a worsening manpower shortage amid the war in West Asia.

Zamir's remarks came at a security meeting, where he flagged concerns over army preparedness.

The manpower crunch has intensified since the outbreak of the Gaza war following the 7 October attacks in 2023. The military has repeatedly informed lawmakers that it is short of around 12,000 troops amid ongoing operational demands.

Zamir stressed the need for a "conscription law, a reserve duty law, and a law to extend mandatory service". —*ANI*

RUBIO TRIES TO WOO G7 ABOUT IRAN WAR

G7 Foreign Ministers met in France on Friday to discuss the West Asia and Russia-Ukraine wars, as US Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** aimed to smooth things over after Trump attacked NATO and Europe.

Most of US' closest allies have refused to get sucked into the war. As the diplomats gathered, France's Minister of the Armed Forces Catherine Vautrin said the war in West Asia "is not ours".

UK, similarly, said that the Iran should not be allowed to hold the global economy hostage, but remained sceptical about joining in.

However, Rubio said that even the countries who are "complaining" should be "grateful" that the US has a President willing to confront Iran. —*PTI*

Don will run for Venezuela's prez

Trump said at a Cabinet meeting that after he completes his term as US President, he may go to Venezuela and "run for President" against interim President Delcy Rodriguez, claiming he was the highest polling person there.

'US may send 10k ground troops'

The US is considering sending an additional 10,000 ground troops to West Asia despite talks with Iran, as per a report by the Wall Street Journal, citing the Penagon sources. The US has already redeployed thousands of troops with aircraft carriers.

ISRAEL STRIKES TEHRAN'S 'HEART', IRAN RETALIATES

Family who fled Israeli strikes in south Lebanon take shelter —x

DUBAI, 27 MARCH

Israel said it attacks on Friday targeted sites "in the heart of Tehran" where ballistic missiles and other weapons are produced. It said it also hit missile launchers and storage sites in Western Iran.

Jan Egeland, secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, said "countless homes, hospitals and schools have been damaged or destroyed", and that nearly every neighbourhood in Tehran has sustained damage.

"If this war continues," Egeland said. "Millions could be forced to flee across borders."

Meanwhile, Kuwait said its Shuwaikh Port in Kuwait City and the Mubarak Al Kabeer Port to the north, which is under construction as part of China's "Belt and Road" initiative, sustained "material damage" from an apparent Iranian strike.

It appeared to be one of the first times a Chinese-affiliated project has come under assault in the war.

2 KILLED IN LEBANON

Lebanon's Health Ministry reported two people were killed by Israel as strikes continued. Israel has said it will set up a security zone in southern Lebanon, while officials called for annexation.

KASH PATEL'S EMAILS HACKED

Iranian hackers said they hacked FBI Chief Kash Patel's emails and released pictures of him smoking cigars, riding in an antique convertible, and making a face while taking a picture of himself in the mirror with a large bottle of rum. Iranian-backed Handala claimed credit for the breach. —*Agencies*

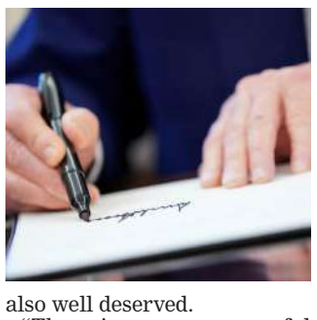
250 YEAR OF US INDEPENDENCE

Trump to be 1st sitting prez with signature on dollar bill

WASHINGTON, 27 MARCH

US President Donald Trump's signature, alongside Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's, will soon appear on American paper currency. This marks the first time a sitting president's name has featured on dollar bills. The Treasury Department's decision coincides with the 250th anniversary of US independence.

US Treasurer Brandon Beach justified the decision claimng that Trump's mark on history as the architect of America's Golden Age economic revival is undeniable, adding that printing his signature on the American currency is not only appropriate, but also well deserved.



"There is no more powerful way to recognise the achievements of President Donald J Trump and the country than US dollar bills bearing his name, and it is only appropriate that this historic currency be issued at the semi-quincentennial," Bessent said.

Similarly, to celebrate the Independence anniversary, a federal arts commission approved the final design for a 24-karat gold commemorative coin bearing Trump's image earlier this month. The coin portrays Trump leaning on the historic Resolute Desk with clenched fists, making it the second time a living president has been featured on a coin. —*PTI*

> "There is no more powerful way to recognise the achievements of Trump than US dollar bills bearing his name"

Ukraine, Saudi agreed to defence cooperation: Zelenskyy

DUBAI, 27 MARCH

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and said that the two countries agreed to "an arrangement" on defence cooperation.

Zelenskyy, in a post on Friday, said the document "lays the foundation for future contracts, technological cooperation, and investment", providing no further details.

Drone combat experts from Ukraine, with over four years of experience in fending off Iran-made drones used during the Russian offensive, are helping five Gulf countries to counter Tehran's attacks, Zelenskyy had earlier said.

They also discussed Russian assistance to Iran and potential energy cooperation, he wrote. —*Agencies*

HOW WORLD MKTS PERFORMED

DOW US	48,981.10	(1.01%) ↓
S&P 500 US	6,515.75	(0.33+%) ↑
Nasdaq US	21,408.08	(2.38%)↓
Nikkei Japan	53,373.07	(0.43%)↓
Hang Seng CHN	24,951.89	(0.38%)↓
DAX GERMANY	22,355.34	(1.14%) ↓
FTSE 100 UK	9,934.04	(0.38%)↓
CAC 40 PARIS	7,703.80	(0.84%) ↓
KOSPI South Korea	5,438.87	(0.38%) ↓

—ANI

Biocon appoints Shreehas Tambe as CEO & MD

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Biocon Ltd announced the appointment of Shreehas Tambe on Friday as its CEO & managing director, effective 1 April. As the first CEO since Biocon Ltd wholly unified owned subsidary, Integrate Biocon Biologics Ltd, Tambe will lead the combined platform spanning biosimilars and generics, strengthening operating scale to compete effectively in global markets. Further, Kedar Upadhye has also been appointed as Chief Financial Officer, Biocon said. Siddharth Mittal, who was the CEO & Managing Director, will now transition to another leadership role within the Biocon Group. Biocon is well-positioned to lead in diabetes, obesity, oncology, and immunology through a differentiated portfolio of biosimilars, insulins, complex generics, and peptides, including GLP-1 therapies, the company said. —*PTI*

—PIXABAY

Silver plunges Rs 11,250/kg, gold drops Rs 1,900

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Precious metal prices dropped up to 5 per cent, with silver plunging by Rs 11,250 to Rs 2.30 lakh per kilogram, while gold declined to Rs 1.47 lakh per 10 grams in Delhi on Friday. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the white metal slumped Rs 11,250, or nearly 5 per cent, to Rs 2,30,000 per kg. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity depreciated by Rs 1,900, or 1.3 per cent, to Rs 1,47,800 per 10 grams. Bullion prices remained volatile as movements in crude oil and global cues influenced investor sentiment. In the international markets, spot gold gained nearly 1 per cent to USD 4,416 per ounce, while silver rose 0.23 per cent at USD 68.12 per ounce. Gold climbed to USD 4,420 per ounce on bargain buying as crude prices weakened, but later pared gains as oil prices recovered, Praveen Singh, Head of commodities at Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.—*PTI*

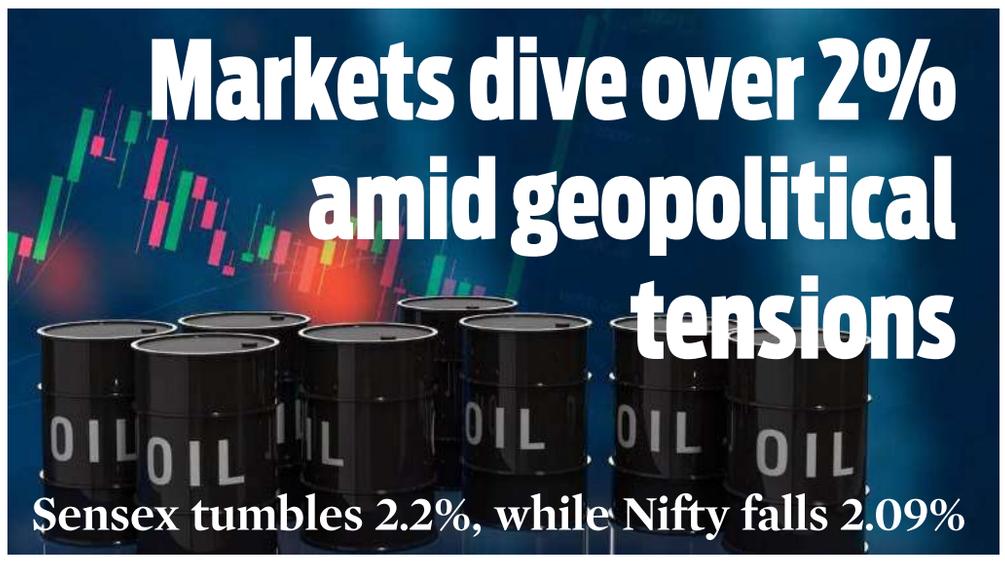
Trade Unions to observe 'Black Day' on 1 April

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

The Platform of Central Trade Unions and Independent Sectoral Federations and Associations on Friday gave a call for observing 1 April as Black Day, to stage a protest against the four labour codes implemented by the government. The Centre implemented Code on Wages 2019, Industrial Relations Code 2020, Social Security Code 2020, and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020, from 21 November, 2025. The central rules will be notified on 1 April. The trade unions have consistently demanded scrapping of these anti-workers labour codes brought in the name of 'labour reform' to facilitate 'ease of doing business'. No consultations with trade unions were held from the drafting stage, they said. —*PTI*

MUMBAI, 27 MARCH

Markets dive over 2% amid geopolitical tensions



Sensex tumbles 2.2%, while Nifty falls 2.09%

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled over 2 per cent on Friday after a two-day rally, in tandem with a global selloff, as investor sentiment weakened due to uncertainties over geopolitical tensions.

Crude oil prices staying above the USD 100 per barrel mark, the rupee's fall to record lows, and unabated foreign fund outflows also added to the gloom.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 1,690.23 points, or 2.25 per cent, to settle at 73,583.22. During the day, it plunged 1,739.04 points, or 2.31 per cent, to 73,534.41.

A total of 3,544 stocks declined, while 822 advanced and 135 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 486.85 points, or 2.09 per cent, to end at 22,819.60.

In a holiday-shortened week, the BSE benchmark lost 949.74 points or 1.27 per cent, and the Nifty tanked 294.9 points or 1.27 per cent.

"Investor sentiment remained fragile due to a lack of clarity surrounding geopolitical tensions between the US and Iran, which once again pushed crude oil prices above the USD 100 mark. In addition, persistent foreign institutional investor outflows and sharp weakness in the rupee further weighed on risk appetite," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Reliance Industries dropped the most by 4.55 per cent, followed by InterGlobe Aviation, Bajaj Finance, State Bank of India, Eternal and HDFC Bank. In contrast, Tata Consultancy Services, Bharti Airtel and Power Grid were the gainers.

The BSE MidCap Select index dropped 2.12 per cent, and the SmallCap Select index declined 1.77 per cent. All sectoral indices ended lower.

The US market ended sharply lower on 26 March.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,805.37 crore on 25 March, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs), however, bought stocks worth Rs 5,429.78 crore. —*PTI*

RIL shares sink 4%, mks cap erodes by Rs 82,000 crore

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Reliance Industries (RIL) shares dropped over 4% on Friday after the government reintroduced windfall taxes on diesel and aviation turbine fuel (ATF) exports.

The sharp drop in the shares of the company wiped off over Rs 82,000 crore from its market value in a single session so far.

The government has now reversed its earlier decision to scrap such taxes, as authorities seek to recalibrate revenue from the energy sector amid heightened volatility in global oil markets.

Reliance Industries, with a market capitalization of over Rs 18 lakh crore, is a major exporter of ATF and diesel. Its two refineries at Jamnagar produce nearly 5 million tonnes of ARF. —*Agencies*

Crude oil futures pare losses, rise 2% on global cues

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Crude oil prices reversed early losses on Friday, rising nearly 2 per cent to Rs 9,061 per barrel.

This follows a global trend driven by tensions across West Asia. Crude oil prices traded back and forth during the week, currently hovering around Rs 8,900 in the domestic markets, Aamir Makda, at Choice Broking, said.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), crude oil for the April delivery opened lower at Rs 8,820 per barrel, but later reversed losses to Rs 9,142 per barrel. Similarly, the May contract also climbed by 1.63 per cent, to Rs 8,866 per barrel on the MCX.

In international markets, May West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude rose 1.19 per cent to USD 95.60 (Rs 9,049) per barrel. Similarly, June Brent Crude edged up 1.13 per cent to USD 103.04 per barrel in New York.

In addition, around 40 per cent of Russia's oil exports have reportedly been halted following Ukrainian drone attacks on major supply pipelines. Oil prices remain volatile due to the unresolved Iran conflict —*PTI*

Govt raises commercial LPG supply to 70% of pre-war demand

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

The central government has increased commercial LPG allocations to states by 20 per cent, raising the quota to 70 per cent of pre-war demand to meet industrial requirements, including steel and automobiles.

Oil Secretary Neeraj Mittal directed that the additional supply be prioritised for labour-intensive industries such as steel, automobiles, textiles, dyes, chemicals, and plastics, which support other essential sectors.

In addition to the existing 50 per cent allocation, the Centre proposed an additional 20 per cent.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas said that India has sufficient stock of crude oil, petrol and diesel, while ensuring an uninterrupted supply of LNG and LPG despite disruptions.

Sujata Sharma, joint secretary (Marketing & Oil Refinery), said the country currently maintains adequate crude inventories, with fuel supplies secured for the next two months.

She added that refineries are operating at full or above capacity, and domestic LPG production has increased by around 20 per cent.

She further said that given India's heavy dependence on LPG imports--nearly 90 per cent of which were routed through the Strait of Hormuz--the government prioritised domestic consumers.

Sharma informed that around 30,000 tonnes of commercial LPG have been supplied since 14 March. Priority has been given to essential segments including restaurants, hotels, industrial canteens, migrant workers, and key sectors such as steel, automobile, textiles, chemicals and plastics.

Additionally, nearly 30,000 small 5-kg cylinders have been distributed to migrant labourers under the Free Trade LPG (FTL) category.

Prices of crude oil, LPG and LNG rose and supplies were affected due to global tensions. The government maintained that these steps have helped stabilise supply chains and ensure the availability of essential fuels. —*PTI*

ICRA revises Indian aviation industry's outlook to 'negative'

MUMBAI, 27 MARCH

Ratings agency ICRA on Friday revised its outlook on the Indian aviation industry to negative from stable, citing disruptions in international airspace due to escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia.

The revision also reflects a sharp depreciation of the rupee against the US dollar and anticipated rises in jet fuel (ATF) prices, ICRA said. These factors are expected to significantly increase costs for airlines, even as demand growth faces downside risks.

ICRA forecasts domestic air passenger traffic growth at 0-3 per cent and international passenger growth for Indian carriers at 7-9 per cent for the current fiscal year, indicating a weak near-term demand environment.

Prior estimates predicted domestic growth at 6-8 per cent and international at 8-10 per cent for FY27.

Flight cancellations, higher airfares due to fuel surcharges and rerouting will weigh on passenger traffic. The removal of airfare caps by DGCA also poses further risks. —*PTI*

Rupee falls to all-time low of 94.8 against USD

MUMBAI, 27 MARCH

- At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 94.18 and breached the 94.50-mark for the first time before closing at 94.82 against the US dollar, down 86 paise from its previous close

The rupee tanked 86 paise to close at yet another all-time low of 94.82 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, weighed down by elevated oil prices and a stronger greenback amid uncertainties over the West Asia conflict.

A sharp decline in the domestic equity markets and sustained FII outflows put further pressure on the local unit, according to forex traders.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 94.18 and breached the 94.50-mark for the first time before closing at 94.82 (provisional) against the US dollar, down 86 paise from its previous close.

The rupee slumped 20 paise to close at a record low of 93.96 against the US dollar on 25 March. Stock, forex, commodity, and bullion markets remained closed on Thursday on account of Ram Navami.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.11 per cent higher at 100.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading at USD 109.8 per barrel, up 0.53 per cent, in futures trade.

On the domestic equity market front, the Sensex crashed 1,690.23 points, or 2.25 per cent, to 73,583.22 points, while the Nifty fell 486.85 points, or 2.09 per cent, to 22,819.60.

Foreign institutional investors sold equities worth Rs 1,805.37 crore on a net basis on 25 March, according to exchange data. —*PTI*

ED files chargesheet in Rs 40K cr RCOM loan fraud

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday filed a chargesheet against former Reliance Communications (RCOM) president **Punit Garg** and another person in an alleged Rs 40,000 crore bank loan fraud case.

The chargesheet was filed before a special court at Rouse Avenue under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The chargesheet names Garg and Vaishali Jairam Mane, a former director at US-based Bonn Investment Inc, as accused in the case. The ED arrested Garg, 61, in January.

The former RCOM president, while holding senior managerial and directorial positions in the company from 2001 to 2025, was actively involved in the acquisition, possession, concealment, layering and dissipation of proceeds of crime generated from the said bank fraud, the ED claimed earlier.

The alleged laundered funds were "diverted" through multiple foreign subsidiaries and offshore entities of RCOM, it alleged.

As RCOM president, Garg was handling the global enterprise business of the company. The proceeds of crime generated from the alleged fraud were "diverted" to purchase a luxury condominium apartment in New York. mane was linked to this apartment.

The property was "fraudulently" sold by Garg in 2023 during a corporate insolvency resolution process of the company. —*PTI*

HDFC Bank chairman quits due to rift with CEO Jagdishan: Report

MUMBAI, 27 MARCH

- The tensions centred on strategic disagreements, governance issues, and the upcoming reappointment of Jagdishan, the report said, citing sources.

A power struggle between HDFC Bank's chairman, Atanu Chakraborty, and CEO Sashidhar Jagdishan led to Chakraborty's sudden resignation, raising concerns over leadership stability at India's largest private lender, reports the Financial Times.

The tensions, which had been brewing for months, centred on strategic disagreements, governance issues, and the upcoming reappointment of Jagdishan, it said, citing sources familiar with the matter.

Chakraborty, who served as non-executive chairman since 2021, quit last week, citing "ethical differences" in his resignation letter. His departure prompted questions on internal governance and the bank's overall health.

The dispute reportedly extended beyond compliance, with insiders highlighting a clash over leadership style, strategy, and control. The disagreement intensified over the renewal of Jagdishan's tenure, subject to regulatory approval.

The bank has engaged law firms, including Wadia Ghandy and Trilegal, to review the matter, examining board proceedings, whistleblower complaints, and past decisions.

The bank plans multiple board discussions over the coming months to review past decisions and address gaps. —*Agencies*

RBI injects Rs 65,322 cr in banking system

MUMBAI, 27 MARCH

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday injected Rs 65,322 crore of transient liquidity into the banking system through a six-day variable rate repo (VRR) auction.

The RBI injected the funds at a cut-off rate of 5.26 per cent and a weighted average rate of 5.29 per cent, the central bank said in a release.

The liquidity injected was lower than the notified amount of Rs 75,000 crore, despite the sharp drop in surplus liquidity in the banking system due to advance tax payments and GST outflows.

Currently, liquidity in the banking system is estimated to be in surplus of around Rs 48,698.38 crore as on 26 March.

RBI infused transient liquidity of Rs 2,08,208 crore into the banking system. —*PTI*

ADDS META AI TOOLS

WhatsApp brings dual accounts on iPhones

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Meta-owned messaging platform WhatsApp on Friday announced a slew of new features, allowing Apple iPhone users to operate two accounts on a single device simultaneously.

The app also introduced a new artificial intelligence (AI) tools for photo editing and drafting messages.

The 'two accounts, one phone' feature, which was previously available only to Android users, is now rolling out on iOS.

The company in a blog post said the update eliminates the need for users to carry two separate devices to manage personal and work conversations. Users will be able to identify the active account via a profile picture visible in the bottom tab of the app.

Riding the generative AI wave, WhatsApp is also integrating Meta AI directly into chats. Users can now utilise Meta AI to touch up photos, remove distracting elements, swap backgrounds, or apply different styles before sending an image.

- The app also introduced a new artificial intelligence (AI) tools for photo editing and drafting messages. The 'two accounts, one phone' feature, which was previously available only to Android users, is now rolling out on iOS. The update eliminates the need for users to carry two separate devices to manage personal and work conversations. Users will be able to identify the active account via a profile picture.

Additionally, an 'AI Writing Help' feature will now draft suggested responses based on the context of the conversation.

Addressing potential security concerns regarding the AI tool, WhatsApp emphasised that user chats will remain "completely private".

The company also noted that the Meta AI features may not be available to all users immediately.

The update also simplifies cross-platform chat transfers. The platform now officially supports moving chat history, including photos and videos, from iOS to Android devices.

Other additions include predictive sticker suggestions, allowing users to swap an emoji for a suggested sticker as they type

The new features are rolling out and will be available to everyone soon, WhatsApp said in a statement. —*PTI*

US JUDGE BLOCKS PENTAGON'S ANTHROPIC BLACKLISTING

SAN FRANCISCO, 27 MARCH

A federal judge has ruled in favour of artificial intelligence company Anthropic in temporarily blocking the Pentagon from labelling the company as a supply chain risk.

US District Judge Rita Lin also blocked President Donald Trump's directive ordering all federal agencies to stop using Anthropic.

The ruling followed a hearing in San Francisco federal court on 24 March at which the judge questioned why the Trump administration took the extraordinary step of denouncing Anthropic as a supply chain risk after negotiations over a defence contract went sour over the company's attempt to prevent its AI technology from being deployed in fully autonomous weapons or surveillance of Americans.

Anthropic, maker of the chatbot Claude, had asked the court to issue an emergency order to remove a stigma that the company alleges was unjustifiably applied as part of an "unlawful campaign of retaliation" that provoked it to sue the Trump administration.

The Pentagon had argued that it should be able to use Claude in any way it deems lawful.

The court said the ruling was about the government's actions in response to it.

Anthropic also filed a separate case in the federal appeals court in Washington DC—*PTI*

RCB look to regroup as CSK, MI hunt lost glory

Virat looks to carry forward last season's momentum, while Rohit eyes a stronger campaign this IPL season

BENGALURU, 27 MARCH

Besieged defending champions attempting to regroup after an unprecedented tragedy, legacy sides seeking redemption, seasoned stalwarts battling for relevance, and a host of hopefuls eager to impress, the 2026 Indian Premier League, beginning Saturday, promises a compelling two months.

Title holders Royal Challengers Bengaluru open the 19th edition against Sunrisers Hyderabad at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, though the build-up has been sombre. The memory of 11 fans who lost their lives in a stampede outside the venue during the team's title celebrations last June continues to cast a shadow.

The Karnataka State Cricket Association has earmarked 11 permanent empty seats in tribute, while RCB players will don jerseys bearing the number 11 during their first practice session. Though poignant, such gestures will soon give way to the demands of competition.

Both RCB and Sunrisers appear light on bowling resources. RCB will miss the services of Josh Hazlewood, still undergoing rehabilitation in Australia, and Yash Dayal, unavailable for the season amid ongoing allegations. The onus will fall on Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Krunal Pandya, Suyash Sharma and Mangesh Yadav to hold the attack together.

RCB's Virat Kohli and Phil Salt during a practice session ahead of the IPL 2026 cricket match against Sunrisers Hyderabad at M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru —*PTI*

Sunrisers, meanwhile, will be without skipper Pat Cummins in the early stages, with Ishan Kishan stepping in as stand-in captain. Their bowling unit, comprising Brydon Carse, Jaydev Unadkat, Harshal Patel and Harsh Dubey, could be exposed on batting-friendly surfaces.

Both teams are likely to rely heavily on their batting strength. RCB boast Virat Kohli, Tim David, Phil Salt, Rajat Patidar and Romario Shepherd, while Sunrisers counter with Travis Head, Abhishek Sharma, Kishan and Heinrich Klaasen.

Among the traditional powerhouses, Mumbai Indians, Chennai Super Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders — who collectively own 13 titles — will look to bounce back from underwhelming campaigns. Mumbai reached the playoffs last season but appeared stretched, while Kolkata and Chennai finished eighth and tenth respectively.

Chennai have refreshed their squad with Sanju Samson, Matt Henry and Noor Ahmad, and will hope for a final flourish from Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who continues to keep his future undecided.

Kolkata have bolstered their batting with Tim Seifert, Finn Allen, Rachin Ravindra and Cameron Green, the highest-paid overseas player in IPL history. Skipper Ajinkya Rahane is expected to anchor the innings, while Rinku Singh assumes the finisher's role vacated by Andre Russell. Their spin duo of Varun Chakravarthy and Sunil Narine remains a key strength, though concerns persist over the pace attack.

Rajasthan Royals and Gujarat Titans will aim to add to their trophy cabinets, while Delhi Capitals, Punjab Kings and Lucknow Super Giants continue their pursuit of a maiden title.

The season also carries an added narrative in the form of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma.

Kohli, having secured his long-awaited IPL title last year, faces the challenge of sustaining motivation. Rohit, by contrast, seeks a standout individual season; the 38-year-old has never crossed 538 runs in a single edition and will look to change that while guiding Mumbai towards a sixth title. —*PTI*

IPL top sports for growth opportunity: RCB owner

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Renowned American companies buying stakes in legacy franchises like RCB and Rajasthan Royals validates how these investors view the IPL as the "highest growth sports opportunity in the world", Times Internet Limited chairman Satyan Gajwani said on Friday.

Gajwani, chairman of Times Internet Limited, said the entry of prominent American investors into legacy franchises such as RCB and Rajasthan Royals reflects strong global confidence in the league's trajectory. "There were multiple international parties interested. It is great validation for the IPL and WPL's success and future promise," he told PTI.

A consortium comprising the Aditya Birla Group, Times Group, David Blitzer's Bolt Group and Blackstone's BXPE recently acquired a 100 per cent stake in RCB from United Spirits Limited for USD 1.78 billion (Rs 16,700 crore), valuing the franchise among the world's elite sports properties.

Calling the valuation "subjective", Gajwani said both buyers and sellers were satisfied with the deal. He also revealed that the Times Group had evaluated Rajasthan Royals before settling on RCB.

He emphasised the consortium's complementary strengths — spanning industrial scale, media, global sports experience and financial acumen. He credited the BCCI for building a premium property. "The IPL and WPL have room for growth, from media rights to deeper fan engagement," he said.

Gajwani confirmed that discussions will be held with Virat Kohli after the deal is finalised, describing him as "an iconic player". He indicated that the franchise name is unlikely to change.

Drawing from experience with Major League Cricket in the US, Gajwani noted that both leagues share the same sport, their markets and growth dynamics are vastly different. —*PTI*

India wins 8 medals in Asia Cup archery

BANGKOK, 27 MARCH

India delivered a commanding performance at the Asia Cup 2026 Archery Stage I in Bangkok, sweeping the men's individual compound podium and finishing with eight medals overall.

Uday Kamboj clinched gold in an all-Indian final, edging past Asian Games medallist Prathamesh Jawkar 145-144. Trailing 57-59 after the second end, Kamboj turned the contest with a perfect 30 in the third before sealing victory. Rajat Chauhan secured bronze, defeating Thailand's Peerawat Rattanapongkiat by an identical 145-144 margin.

In the women's individual compound event, Tejal Salve struck gold with a dominant 144-135 win over Mariia Dimidiuk, dropping just six points across 15 arrows.

India also excelled in team events. The mixed compound pair of Chikitha Taniparthi and Rajat Chauhan claimed gold, defeating Malaysia's Fatin Nurfatehah Mat Salleh and Mohd Juwaidi Mazuki 158-156 in a closely fought final. The top-seeded Indian duo held their nerve in the final end, shooting four successive 10s to secure victory.

Uday Kamboj clinched gold in an all-Indian final -*ANI*

The women's compound team of Chikitha Taniparthi, Raj Kaur and Tejal Salve settled for silver after a narrow 227-229 defeat to Kazakhstan. Despite leading 115-113 midway, a costly third end allowed their opponents to take control.

- The women's compound team of Chikitha Taniparthi, Raj Kaur and Tejal Salve settled for silver after a narrow 227-229 defeat to Kazakhstan. Despite early lead, a costly third end allowed their opponents to take control

Earlier, India had added two bronze medals through the men's compound team of Rajat Chauhan, Uday Kamboj and Rishabh Yadav, and the women's recurve team of Ruma Biswas, Kirti and Ridhi.

With six medals in the kitty on Friday, India concluded the competition with a total of eight medals — two gold, two silver and four bronze medals — underlining their dominance in the compound events at the Asia Cup.—*ANI*

Kabaddi camp for Asian Games to be held in Ballari

BALLARI/NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

India's preparations for the Asian Games in Japan later this year gathered momentum with national camps in kabaddi and rowing commencing on Friday.

A high-performance strength and conditioning camp for kabaddi probables is being held at the Inspire Institute of Sport in Ballari from 27 March to 2 April. Leading men's players such as Naveen Kumar, Pawan Sehrawat, Arjun Deshwal, Aslam Inamdar, Sunil Kumar, Ashu Malik and Bharat Hooda are part of the programme.

The women's group includes skipper Ritu Negi, Sonali Vishnu Shingate, Pushpa Rana, Champa Thakur, Pinki Roy, Priya and Karthika R, many of whom were part of India's Women's Kabaddi World Cup-winning squad.

Organised by the Amateur Kabaddi Federation of India, the camp focuses on athlete development, fitness optimisation and long-term performance. "This initiative is an important step in raising the standard of kabaddi," said AKFI president Vibhor Vineet Jain, while Pro Kabaddi League commissioner Anupam Goswami noted that 45 probables in each section would benefit.

- Organised by the Amateur Kabaddi Federation of India, the camp focuses on athlete development, fitness optimisation and long-term performance. It's a step to raising the standard of kabaddi

Meanwhile, a 51-day national women's rowing camp has begun in Gorakhpur at the Water Sports Complex on Ramgarh Lake, organised by the Sports Authority of India in collaboration with the Rowing Federation of India.

The camp will prepare athletes for the Asian Games (19 September to 4 October).—*PTI*

Aditi Ashok tied for 108th at Ford Championship

CHANDLER, 27 MARCH

India's Aditi Ashok carded an even-par 72 to lie tied 108th after the opening round of the Ford Championship at the Cattail Course. Starting on the back nine, the 27-year-old made a bright beginning with three successive birdies on the 11th, 12th and 13th holes. However, she dropped shots on the 18th and endured a mixed run thereafter, adding two more birdies on the first and second before successive bogeys on the third and fourth. Bogeys on the sixth and seventh saw her finish with five birdies and five-bogeys. At the top, Lydia Ko (60) and Hyo Joo Kim (61) fired exceptional rounds to lead.—*PTI*

Sahith tied-11th in opening round at Houston Open

HOUSTON, 27 MARCH

Indian-American golfer Sahith Theegala opened with a 3-under 67 to lie tied 11th after the first round of the Texas Children's Houston Open, four shots behind leader Paul Waring. Theegala began on the back nine, dropping a shot on the 11th before a birdie on the 16th saw him turn at even par. He then produced a bogey-free front nine, with birdies on the third, sixth and eighth, finishing with four birdies and one bogey. Indian-born Canadian Sudarshan Yellamaraju was tied 59th after a 1-under 69. Waring led with a bogey-free 7-under 63, one ahead of Gary Woodland (64), who carded seven birdies and a bogey. —*PTI*

Iran asks its sports teams not to travel to 'hostile' nations

TEHRAN, 27 MARCH

Iran has barred its sports teams from travelling to countries it considers "hostile", state television reported on Thursday, casting uncertainty over upcoming international fixtures, including Tractor FC's Asian Champions League Elite tie in Saudi Arabia.

The directive, issued by the Ministry of Sports, stops short of explicitly mentioning the FIFA World Cup, which begins on 11 June across the United States, Canada and Mexico. However, it underscores growing regional tensions and security concerns following the ongoing conflict involving Iran.

"The presence of national and club teams in countries that are considered hostile and are unable to ensure the security of Iranian athletes and team members is prohibited until further notice," the ministry said.

The announcement directly impacts Tractor FC's scheduled playoff clash against Shabab Al Ahli of Dubai, set to be held in Saudi Arabia. The fixture was confirmed following the Asian Football Confederation's draw for the quarterfinals. The AFC had earlier rescheduled the western zone playoffs, delayed due to the conflict, for 13–14 April in Jeddah, which is also due to host the latter stages of the tournament from 16–25 April.

Iran has asked its football federation and clubs to notify the AFC to seek relocation of matches. Uncertainty prevails over Iran's participation in the World Cup. —*PTI*

Italy, Sweden among finalists in FIFA WC

MEXICO CITY/ FOXBOROUGH, 27 MARCH

The race for the final six spots at the FIFA World Cup intensified as Italy, Sweden, Türkiye and Denmark advanced to the European play-off finals, while France warmed up with a 2-1 win over Brazil in an international friendly.

Four-time champions Italy defeated Northern Ireland 2-0 in Path A, courtesy of goals from Sandro Tonali and Moise Kean, and will face Bosnia and Herzegovina, who edged Wales on penalties after a 1-1 draw.

In Path B, Viktor Gyökeres struck a hat-trick to power Sweden past Ukraine 3-1. They will meet Poland, who staged a 2-1 comeback win over Albania through Robert Lewandowski and Piotr Zieliński.

Türkiye advanced from Path C with a 1-0 win over Romania, while Kosovo beat Slovakia 4-3 in a high-scoring contest to set up their final clash.

Denmark cruised into the Path D final with a 4-0 win over North Macedonia, highlighted by Gustav Isaksen's brace, and will face Czechia, who beat the Republic of Ireland on penalties after a 2-2 draw. The play-off finals are scheduled for March 31.

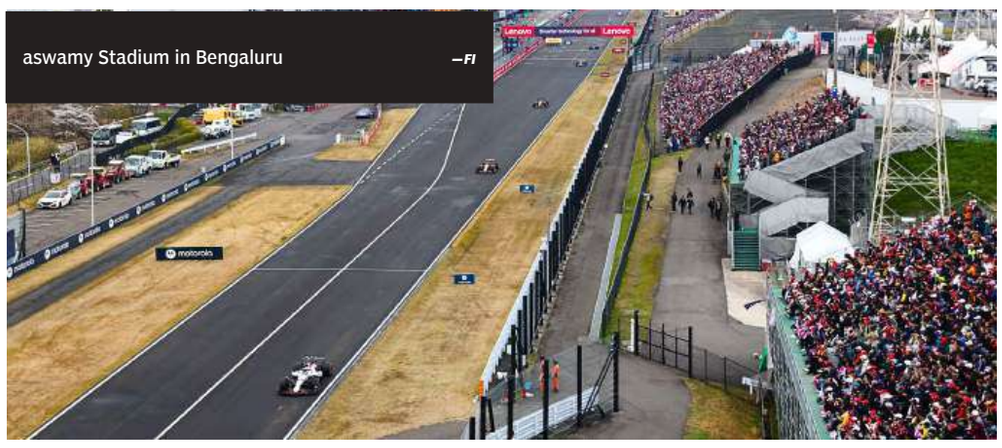
Italy's Moise Kean attempts top score with a bicycle kick during the World Cup qualifying play-off soccer match between Italy and Northern Ireland, in Bergamo, Italy. —*AP*

In the intercontinental pathway, Bolivia's 2-1 win over Suriname set up a final against Iraq on April 1 for the remaining berths.

In Foxborough, Kylian Mbappé marked his return from a knee injury with a goal as France beat Brazil 2-1 in a World Cup tune-up. Mbappé, making his first start after a month out, opened the scoring before Hugo Ekitike doubled the lead. Bremer pulled one back late for Brazil. —*PTI*

SAUDI, BAHRAIN RACES CANCELLED

F1's Japanese GP will be the last for 5 weeks due to Iran war



aswamy Stadium in Bengaluru —*FI*

SUZUKA, 27 MARCH

The Japanese Grand Prix this weekend marks the final Formula One race for five weeks, with rounds in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia called off due to the ongoing conflict in Iran. The next race is scheduled for May 3 in Miami.

After two races in Australia and China, Mercedes and Ferrari have emerged as early front-runners following sweeping regulation changes to power units and chassis. George Russell and Kimi Antonelli have claimed a win each, while Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton and Charles Leclerc have alternated between third and fourth. Both teams are tipped to perform strongly at Suzuka, one of F1's most iconic and technically demanding circuits.

Hamilton returns to a venue where precision is key on its narrow, twisting layout.

McLaren, however, have endured a difficult start despite last season's dominance. Neither Lando Norris nor Oscar Piastri started in China due to electrical issues. "We understand the source of the problem," said team principal Andrea Stella, expressing confidence in a recovery.

Red Bull have also struggled, with four-time champion Max Verstappen retiring in China and criticising the new regulations as "yo-yo racing". He indicated the upcoming break would allow the team to regroup.

Honda, now supplying Aston Martin after Red Bull's switch to Ford power, has faced reliability concerns. Fernando Alonso, Lance Stroll are yet to finish a race due to engine vibrations.

In Friday's second practice, Piastri set the pace ahead of Antonelli and Russell. Norris came fourth, Ferrari duo Leclerc, Hamilton completing the top six. —*PTI*